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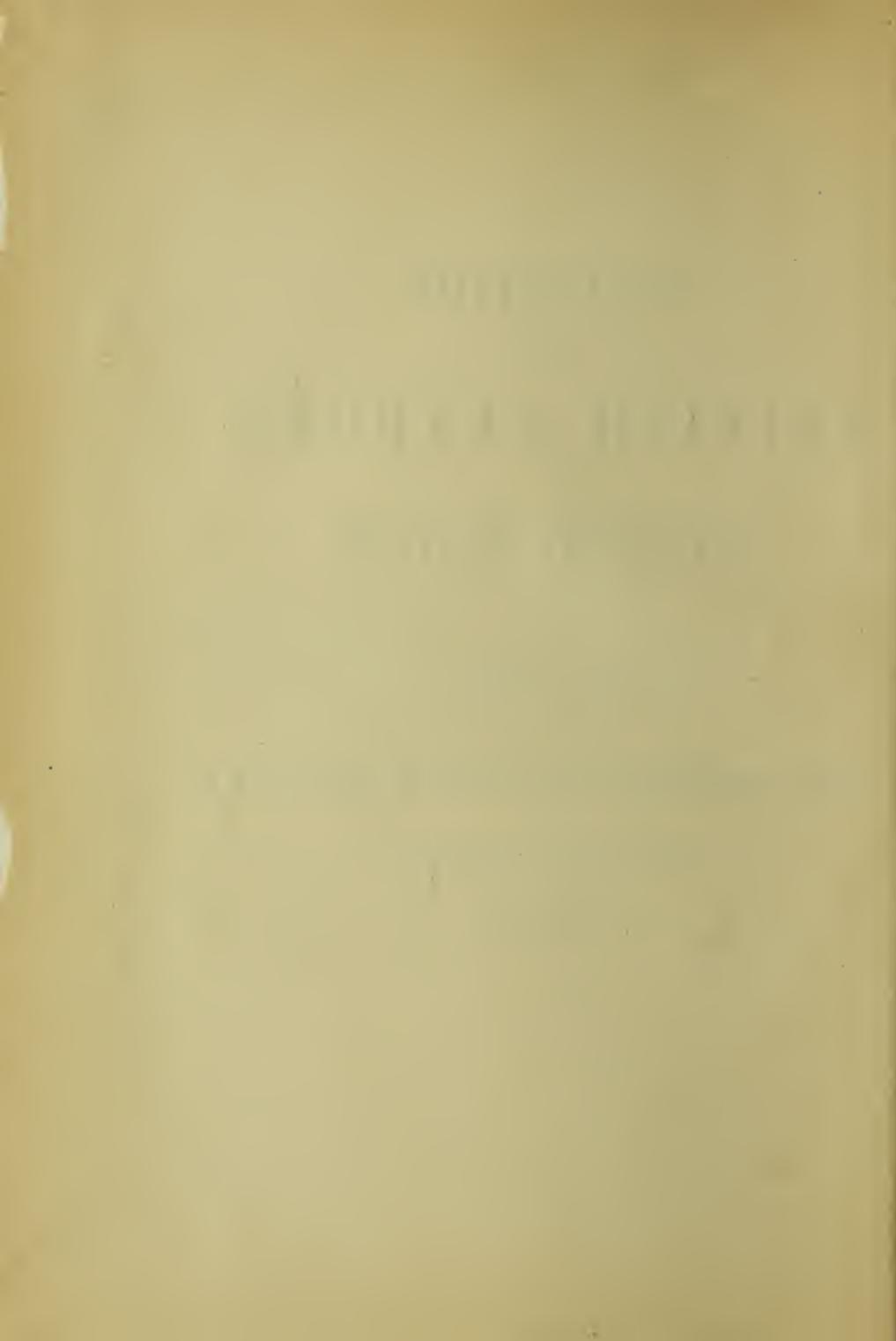
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VOL. 1740.

IS HE POPENJOY? BY ANTHONY TROLLOPE.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.



IS HE POPENJOY?

A NOVEL.

BY

ANTHONY TROLLOPE,

AUTHOR OF

“THE AMERICAN SENATOR,” “SOUTH AFRICA,” ETC.

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IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ

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IS HE POPENJOY?

CHAPTER I.

The Marquis sees his Brother.

WHEN Lord George was summoned down to Manor Cross, or rather to Cross Hall, he did not dare not to go. Lady Sarah had told him that it was his duty, and he could not deny the assertion. But he was very angry with his brother, and did not in the least wish to see him. Nor did he think that by seeing him he could in any degree render easier that horrible task which would, sooner or later, be imposed upon him, of testing the legitimacy of his brother's child. And there were other reasons which made him unwilling to leave London. He did not like to be away from his young wife. She was, of course, a matron now, and entitled to be left alone, according to the laws of the world; but then she was so childish, and so fond of playing bagatelle with Jack De Baron! He had never had occasion to find fault with her; not to say words to her which he himself would regard as fault-finding words, though she had complained more than once of his scolding her. He would caution her, beg her to be grave, ask her to read heavy books, and try to im-

press her with the solemnity of married life. In this way he would quell her spirits for a few hours. Then she would burst out again, and there would be Jack De Baron and the bagatelle. In all these sorrows he solaced himself by asking advice from Mrs. Houghton. By degrees he told Mrs. Houghton almost everything. The reader may remember that there had been a moment in which he had resolved that he would not again go to Berkeley Square. But all that was very much altered now. He was there almost every day, and consulted the lady about everything. She had induced him even to talk quite openly about this Italian boy, to express his suspicions, and to allude to most distressing duties which might be incumbent on him. She strenuously advised him to take nothing for granted. If the marquise was to be had by careful scrutiny she was quite of opinion that it should not be lost by careless confidence. This sort of friendship was very pleasant to him, and especially so because he could tell himself that there was nothing wicked in it. No doubt her hand would be in his sometimes for a moment, and once or twice his arm had almost found its way round her waist. But these had been small deviations, which he had taken care to check. No doubt it had occurred to him once or twice that she had not been careful to check them. But this, when he thought of it maturely, he attributed to innocence.

It was at last, by her advice, that he begged that one of his sisters might come up to town, as a companion to Mary during his absence at Cross

Hall. This counsel she had given to him after assuring him half-a-dozen times that there was nothing to fear. He had named Amelia, Mary having at once agreed to the arrangement, on condition that the younger of the three sisters should be invited. The letter was of course written to Lady Sarah. All such letters always were written to Lady Sarah. Lady Sarah had answered, saying that Susanna would take the place destined for Amelia. Now Susanna, of all the Germain family, was the one whom Mary disliked the most. But there was no help for it. She thought it hard, but she was not strong enough in her own position to say that she would not have Susanna, because Susanna had not been asked.

"I think Lady Susanna will be the best," said Lord George, "because she has so much strength of character."

"Strength of character! You speak as if you were going away for three years, and were leaving me in the midst of danger. You'll be back in five days, I suppose. I really think I could have got on without Susanna's—strength of character!" This was her revenge; but, all the same, Lady Susanna came.

"She is as good as gold," said Lord George, who was himself as weak as water. "She is as good as gold; but there is a young man comes here whom I don't care for her to see too often." This was what he said to Lady Susanna.

"Oh, indeed! Who is he?"

"Captain De Baron. You are not to suppose that she cares a straw about him."

"Oh no; I am sure there can be nothing of that," said Lady Susanna, feeling herself to be as energetic as Cerberus, and as many-eyed as Argus.

"You must take care of yourself now, Master Jack," Mrs. Houghton said to her cousin. "A duenna has been sent for."

"Duennas always go to sleep, don't they; and take tips; and are generally open to reason?"

"Oh heavens! Fancy tipping Lady Susanna! I should think that she never slept in her life with both eyes at the same time, and that she thinks in her heart that every man who says a civil word ought to have his tongue cut out."

"I wonder how she'd take it if I were to say a civil word to herself?"

"You can try; but as far as Madame is concerned, you had better wait till Monsieur is back again."

Lord George, having left his wife in the hands of Lady Susanna, went down to Brotherton and on to Cross Hall. He arrived on the Saturday after that first Sunday visit paid by the Marquis to his mother. The early part of the past week had been very blank down in those parts. No further personal attempts had been made to intrude upon the Manor Cross mysteries. The Dean had not been seen again, even at Cross Hall.

Mrs. Holdenough had made no attempt after the reception—or rather non-reception—awarded to his

wife. Old Mr. De Baron had driven over, and had seen the Marquis, but nothing more than that fact was known at Cross Hall. He had been there for about an hour, and as far as Mrs. Toff knew, the Marquis had been very civil to him. But Mr. De Baron, though a cousin, was not by any means one of the Germain party. Then, on Saturday there had been an affair. Mrs. Toff had come to the Hall, boiling over with the importance of her communication, and stating that she had been—turned out of the house. She, who had presided over everything material at Manor Cross for more than thirty years, from the family pictures down to the kitchen utensils, had been absolutely desired to—walk herself off. The message had been given to her by that accursed courier, and she had then insisted on seeing the Marquis. “My lord,” she said, “only laughed at her.” “Mrs. Toff,” he had said, “you are my mother’s servant, and my sisters’. You had better go and live with them.” She had then hinted at the shortness of the notice given her, upon which he had offered her anything she chose to ask in the way of wages, and board wages. “But I wouldn’t take a penny, my lady; only just what was due up to the very day.” As Mrs. Toff was a great deal too old a servant to be really turned away, and as she merely migrated from Manor Cross to Cross Hall, she did not injure herself much by refusing the offers made to her.

It must be held that the Marquis was justified in getting rid of Mrs. Toff. Mrs. Toff was, in truth, a spy in his camp, and of course his own people

were soon aware of that fact. Her almost daily journeys to Cross Hall were known, and it was remembered, both by the Marquis and his wife, that this old woman, who had never been allowed to see the child, but who had known all the preceding generation as children, could not but be an enemy. Of course it was patent to all the servants, and to everyone connected with the two houses, that there was war. Of course, the Marquis, having an old woman acting spy in his stronghold, got rid of her. But justice would shortly have required that the other old woman, who was acting spy in the other stronghold, should be turned out also. But the Marchioness, who had promised to tell everything to her son, could not very well be offered wages and be made to go.

In the midst of the ferment occasioned by this last piece of work Lord George reached Cross Hall. He had driven through the park, that way being nearly as short as the high-road, and had left word at the house that he would call on the following morning, immediately after morning church. This he did, in consequence of a resolution which he made to act on his own judgment. A terrible crisis was coming, in which it would not be becoming that he should submit himself either to his eldest sister or to the Dean. He had talked the matter over fully with Mrs. Houghton, and Mrs. Houghton had suggested that he should call on his way out to the Hall.

The ladies had at first to justify their request that he should come to them, and there was a dif-

ficulty in doing this, as he was received in presence of their mother. Lady Sarah had not probably told herself that the Marchioness was a spy, but she had perceived that it would not be wise to discuss everything openly in her mother's presence. "It is quite right that you should see him," said Lady Sarah.

"Quite right," said the old lady.

"Had he sent me even a message I should have been here, of course," said the brother. "He passed through London, and I would have met him there, had he not kept everything concealed."

"He isn't like anybody else, you know. You mustn't quarrel with him. He is the head of the family. If we quarrel with him, what will become of us?"

"What will become of him if everybody falls off from him. That's what I'm thinking off," said Lady Sarah.

Soon after this all the horrors that had taken place—horrors which could not be entrusted to a letter—were narrated to him. The Marquis had insulted Dr. Pountner, he had not returned the bishop's visit, he had treated the Dean with violent insolence, and he had refused to receive his brother-in-law, Mr. Holdenough, though the Holdenoughs had always moved in county society! He had declared that none of his relatives were to be introduced to his wife. He had not as yet allowed the so-called Popenjoy to be seen. He had said none of them were to trouble him at Manor Cross, and had explained his purpose of only coming to the

Hall when he knew that his sister Sarah was away. "I think he must be mad," said the younger brother.

"It is what comes of living in a godless country like Italy," said Lady Amelia.

"It is what comes of utterly disregarding duty," said Lady Sarah.

But what was to be done? The Marquis had declared his purpose of doing what he liked with his own, and certainly none of them could hinder him. If he chose to shut himself and his wife up at the big house, he must do so. It was very bad, but it was clear that they could not interfere with his eccentricities. How was anybody to interfere? Of course there was present in the mind of each of them a feeling that this woman might not be his wife, or that the child might not be legitimate. But they did not like, with open words among themselves, to accuse their brother of so great a crime. "I don't see what there is to be done," said Lord George.

The church was in the park, not very far from the house, but nearer to the gate leading to Brotherton. On that Sunday morning the Marchioness and her youngest daughter went there in the carriage, and in doing so had to pass the front doors. The previous Sunday had been cold, and this was the first time that the Marchioness had seen Manor Cross since her son had been there. "Oh dear! if I could only go in and see the dear child!" she said.

"You know you can't, mamma," said Amelia.

"It is all Sarah's fault, because she would quarrel with him."

After church the ladies returned in the carriage, and Lord George went to the house according to his appointment. He was shown into a small parlour, and in about half-an-hour's time luncheon was brought to him. He then asked whether his brother was coming. The servant went away, promising to inquire, but did not return. He was cross, and would eat no lunch; but after awhile rang the bell loudly, and again asked the same question. The servant again went away and did not return. He had just made up his mind to leave the house and never return to it, when the courier, of whom he had heard, came to usher him into his brother's room. "You seem to be in a deuce of a hurry, George," said the Marquis, without getting out of his chair. "You forget that people don't get up at the same hour all the world over."

"It's half-past two now."

"Very likely; but I don't know that there is any law to make a man dress himself before that hour."

"The servant might have given me a message."

"Don't make a row now you are here, old fellow. When I found you were in the house I got down as fast as I could. I suppose your time isn't so very precious."

Lord George had come there determined not to quarrel if he could help it. He had very nearly quarrelled already. Every word that his brother said was in truth an insult—being, as they were,

the first words spoken after so long an interval. They were intended to be insolent, probably intended to drive him away. But if anything was to be gained by the interview he must not allow himself to be driven away. He had a duty to perform—a great duty. He was the last man in England to suspect a fictitious heir—would at any rate be the last to hint at such an iniquity without the strongest ground. Who is to be true to a brother if not a brother? Who is to support the honour of a great family if not its own scions? Who is to abstain from wasting the wealth and honour of another, if not he who has the nearest chance of possessing them? And yet who could be so manifestly bound as he to take care that no surreptitious head was imposed upon the family. This little child was either the real Popenjoy, a boy to be held by him as of all boys the most sacred, to the promotion of whose welfare all his own energies would be due—or else a brat so abnormally distasteful and abominable as to demand from him an undying enmity, till the child's wicked pretensions should be laid at rest. There was something very serious in it, very tragic—something which demanded that he should lay aside all common anger, and put up with many insults on behalf of the cause which he had in hand.

“Of course I could wait,” said he; “only I thought that perhaps the man would have told me.”

“The fact is, George, we are rather a divided house here. Some of us talk Italian and some Eng-

lish. I am the only common interpreter in the house, and I find it a bore."

"I daresay it is troublesome."

"And what can I do for you now you are here?"

Do for him! Lord George didn't want his brother to do anything for him. "Live decently, like an English nobleman, and do not outrage your family." That would have been the only true answer he could have made to such a question.

"I thought you would wish to see me after your return," he said.

"It's rather lately thought of; but, however, let that pass. So you've got a wife for yourself."

"As you have done also."

"Just so. I have got a wife too. Mine has come from one of the oldest and noblest families in Christendom."

"Mine is the granddaughter of a livery-stable keeper," said Lord George, with a touch of real grandeur; "and, thank God, I can be proud of her in any society in England."

"I daresay; particularly as she had some money."

"Yes; she had money. I could hardly have married without. But when you see her I think you will not be ashamed of her as your sister-in-law."

"Ah! She lives in London, and I am just at present down here."

"She is the daughter of the Dean of Brotherton."

"So I have heard. They used to make gentlemen deans."

After this there was a pause, Lord George finding it difficult to go on with the conversation without a quarrel.

"To tell you the truth, George, I will not willingly see anything more of your Dean. He came here and insulted me. He got up and blustered about the room because I wouldn't thank him for the honour he had done our family by his alliance. If you please, George, we'll understand that the less said about the Dean the better. You see I haven't any of the money out of the stable-yard."

"My wife's money didn't come out of a stable-yard. It came from a wax-chandler's shop," said Lord George, jumping up, just as the Dean had done. There was something in the man's manner worse even than his words, which he found it almost impossible to bear. But he seated himself again as his brother sat looking at him with a bitter smile upon his face. "I don't suppose," he said, "you can wish to annoy me."

"Certainly not. But I wish that the truth should be understood between us."

"Am I to be allowed to pay my respects to your wife?" said Lord George, boldly.

"I think, you know, that we have gone so far apart in our marriages that there is nothing to be gained by it. Besides, you couldn't speak to her—nor she to you."

"May I be permitted to see—Popenjoy?"

The Marquis paused a moment, and then rang the bell.

"I don't know what good it will do you, but if he can be made fit he shall be brought down."

The courier entered the room and received certain orders in Italian. After that there was considerable delay, during which an Italian servant brought the Marquis a cup of chocolate and a cake. He pushed a newspaper over to his brother, and as he was drinking his chocolate, lighted a cigarette. In this way there was a delay of over an hour, and then there entered the room an Italian nurse with a little boy who seemed to Lord George to be nearly two years old. The child was carried in by the woman, but Lord George thought that he was big enough to have walked. He was dressed up with many ribbons, and was altogether as gay as apparel could make him. But he was an ugly, swarthy little boy, with great black eyes, small cheeks, and a high forehead—very unlike such a Popenjoy as Lord George would have liked to have seen. Lord George got up and stood over him, and leaning down kissed the high forehead. "My poor little darling," he said.

"As for being poor," said the Marquis, "I hope not. As to being a darling, I should think it doubtful. If you've done with him, she can take him away, you know." Lord George had done with him, and so he was taken away. "Seeing is believing, you know," said the Marquis; "that's the only good of it." Lord George said to himself that in this case seeing was not believing.

At this moment the open carriage came round to the door. "If you like to get up behind," said the Marquis, "I can take you back to Cross Hall, as

I am going to see my mother. Perhaps you'll remember that I wish to be alone with her." Lord George then expressed his preference for walking, "Just as you please. I want to say a word. Of course I took it very ill of you all when you insisted on keeping Cross Hall in opposition to my wishes. No doubt they acted on your advice."

"Partly so."

"Exactly; yours and Sarah's. You can't expect me to forget it, George—that's all." Then he walked out of the room among the servants, giving his brother no opportunity for further reply.

CHAPTER II.

The Marquis goes into Brotherton.

THE poor dear old Marchioness must have had some feeling that she was regarded as a spy. She had promised to tell everything to her eldest son, and though she had really nothing to tell, though the Marquis did in truth know all that there was as yet to know, still there grew up at Cross Hall a sort of severance between the unhappy old lady and her children. This showed itself in no diminution of affectionate attention; in no intentional change of manner; but there was a reticence about the Marquis and Popenjoy which even she perceived, and there crept into her mind a feeling that Mrs. Toff was on her guard against her—so that on two occasions she almost snubbed Mrs. Toff. “I never see’d him, my lady; what more can I say?” said Mrs. Toff. “Toff, I don’t believe you wanted to see your master’s son and heir!” said the Marchioness. Then Mrs. Toff pursed up her lips, and compressed her nose, and half-closed her eyes, and the Marchioness was sure that Mrs. Toff did not believe in Popenjoy.

No one but Lord George had seen Popenjoy. To no eyes but his had the august baby been displayed. Of course many questions had been asked, especially by the old lady, but the answers to them

had not been satisfactory. "Dark, is he?" asked the Marchioness. Lord George replied that the child was very swarthy. "Dear me! That isn't like the Germains. The Germains were never light, but they're not swarthy. Did he talk at all?" "Not a word." "Did he play about?" "Never was out of the nurse's arms." "Dear me! Was he like Brotherton?" "I don't think I am a judge of likenesses." "He's a healthy child?" "I can't say. He seemed to be a good deal done up with finery." Then the Marchioness declared that her younger son showed an unnatural indifference to the heir of the family. It was manifest that she intended to accept the new Popenjoy, and to ally herself with no party base enough to entertain any suspicion.

These examinations respecting the baby went on for the three first days of the week. It was Lord George's intention to return to town on the Saturday, and it seemed to them all to be necessary that something should be arranged before that. Lady Sarah thought that direct application should be made to her brother for proof of his marriage and for a copy of the register of the birth of his child. She quite admitted that he would resent such application with the bitterest enmity. But that, she thought, must be endured. She argued that nothing could be done more friendly to the child than this. If all was right the inquiry which circumstances certainly demanded would be made while he could not feel it. If no such proof were adduced now there would certainly be trouble, misery, and perhaps ruin in coming years. If the necessary evidence were forth-

coming, then no one would wish to interfere further. There might be ill blood on their brother's part, but there would be none on theirs. Neither Lord George nor their younger sister gainsaid this altogether. Neither of them denied the necessity of inquiry. But they desired to temporise; and then how was the inquiry to be made? Who was to bell the cat? And how should they go on when the Marquis refused to take any heed of them—as, of course, he would do? Lady Sarah saw at once that they must employ a lawyer—but what lawyer? Old Mr. Stokes, the family attorney, was the only lawyer they knew. But Mr. Stokes was Lord Brotherton's lawyer, and would hardly consent to be employed against his own client. Lady Sarah suggested that Mr. Stokes might be induced to explain to the Marquis that these inquiries should be made for his, the Marquis's, own benefit. But Lord George felt that this was impossible. It was evident that Lord George would be afraid to ask Mr. Stokes to undertake the work.

At last it came to be understood among them that they must have some friend to act with them. There could be no doubt who that friend should be. "As to interfering," said Lady Sarah, speaking of the Dean, "he will interfere, whether we ask him to or not. His daughter is as much affected as anybody, and if I understand him he is not the man to see any interest of his own injured by want of care." Lord George shook his head, but yielded. He greatly disliked the idea of putting himself into the Dean's hands—of becoming a creature of the Dean's. He

felt the Dean to be stronger than himself, endowed with higher spirit and more confident hopes. But he also felt that the Dean was—the son of a stable-keeper. Though he had professed to his brother that he could own the fact without shame, still he was ashamed. It was not the Dean's parentage that troubled him so much as a consciousness of some defect, perhaps only of the absence of some quality, which had been caused by that parentage. The man looked like a gentleman, but still there was a smell of the stable. Feeling this rather than knowing it, Lord George resisted for awhile the idea of joining forces with the Dean; but when it was suggested to him as an alternative that he himself must go to Mr. Stokes and explain his suspicions in the lawyer's room, then he agreed that, as a first step, he would consult the Dean. The Dean, no doubt, would have his own lawyer, who would not care a fig for the Marquis.

It was thought by them at Cross Hall that the Dean would come over to them, knowing that his son-in-law was in the country; but the Dean did not come, probably waiting for the same compliment from Lord George. On the Friday Lord George rode into Brotherton early, and was at the Deanery by eleven o'clock.

“I thought I should see you,” said the Dean, in his pleasantest manner. “Of course, I heard from Mary that you were down here. Well, what do you think of it all?”

“It is not pleasant.”

“If you mean your brother, I am bound to say”

that he is very unpleasant. Of course you have seen him?"

"Yes, I have seen him."

"And her ladyship?"

"No. He said that as I did not speak Italian it would be no good."

"And he seemed to think," said the Dean, "that as I do speak Italian it would be dangerous. Nobody has seen her then?"

"Nobody."

"That promises well! And the little lord?"

"He was brought down to me."

"That was gracious! Well, what of him; did he look like a Popenjoy?"

"He is a nasty little black thing."

"I shouldn't wonder."

"And looks—— Well, I don't want to abuse the poor child, and God knows, if he is what he pretends to be, I would do anything to serve him."

"That's just it, George," said the Dean, very seriously—seriously, and with his kindest manner, being quite disposed to make himself agreeable to Lord George if Lord George would be agreeable to him. "That's just it. If we were certified as to that, what would we not do for the child in spite of the father's brutality? There is no dishonesty on our side, George. You know of me, and I know of you, that if every tittle of the evidence of that child's birth were in the keeping of either of us, so that it could be destroyed on the moment, it should be made as public as the winds of heaven to-morrow, so that it was

true evidence. If he be what he pretends to be, who would interfere with him? But if he be not?"

"Any suspicion of that kind is unworthy of us, except on very strong ground."

"True. But if there be very strong ground, it is equally true that such suspicion is our duty. Look at the case. When was it that he told you that he was going to be married? About six months since, as far as my memory goes."

"He said, 'I am to be married.'"

"That is speaking in the future tense; and now he claims to have been married two or three years ago. Has he ever attempted to explain this?"

"He has not said a word about it. He is quite unwilling to talk about himself."

"I daresay. But a man in such circumstances must be made to talk about himself. You and I are so placed that if we did not make him talk about himself, we ought to be made to make him do so. He may be deceitful if he pleases. He may tell you and me fibs without end; and he may give us much trouble by doing so. Such trouble is the evil consequence of having liars in the world." Lord George winced at the rough word as applied by inference to his own brother. "But liars themselves are always troubled by their own lies. If he chooses to tell you that on a certain day he is about to be married, and afterwards springs a two-year-old child upon you as legitimate, you are bound to think that there is some deceit. You cannot keep yourself from knowing that there is falsehood; and if falsehood, then probably fraud. Is it likely that a man with

such privileges, and such property ensured to a legitimate son, would allow the birth of such a child to be slurred over without due notice of it? You say that suspicion on our part without strong ground would be unworthy of us. I agree with you. But I ask you whether the grounds are not so strong as to force us to suspect. Come," he continued, as Lord George did not answer at once; "let us be open to each other, knowing as each does that the other means to do what is right. Do not you suspect?"

"I do," said Lord George.

"And so do I. And I mean to learn the truth."

"But how?"

"That is for us to consider; but of one thing I am quite sure. I am quite certain that we must not allow ourselves to be afraid of your brother. To speak the truth, as it must be spoken, he is a bully, George."

"I would rather you would not abuse him, sir."

"Speak ill of him I must. His character is bad, and I have to speak of it. He is a bully. He set himself to work to put me down when I did myself the honour to call on him, because he felt that my connection with you would probably make me an enemy to him. I intend that he shall know that he cannot put me down. He is undoubtedly Lord Brotherton. He is the owner of a wide property. He has many privileges and much power, with which I cannot interfere. But there is a limit to them. If he have a legitimate son, those privileges will be that son's property; but he has to show to the world

that that son is legitimate. When a man marries before all the world, in his own house, and a child is born to him as I may say openly, the proofs are there of themselves. No bringing up of evidence is necessary. The thing is simple, and there is no suspicion and no inquiry. But he has done the reverse of this, and now flatters himself that he can cow those who are concerned by a domineering manner. He must be made to feel that this will not prevail."

"Sarah thinks that he should be invited to produce the necessary certificates."

Lord George, when he dropped his sister's title in speaking of her to the Dean, must have determined that very familiar intercourse with the Dean was a necessity.

"Lady Sarah is always right. That should be the first step. But will you invite him to do so? How shall the matter be broken to him?"

"She thinks a lawyer should do it."

"It must be done either by you or by a lawyer." Lord George looked very blank. "Of course, if the matter were left in my hands—if I had to do it—I should not do it personally. The question is, whether you might not in the first instance write to him?"

"He would not notice it."

"Very likely not. Then we must employ a lawyer."

The matter was altogether so distasteful to Lord George that more than once during the interview he almost made up his mind that he would withdraw

altogether from the work, and at any rate appear to take it for granted that the child was a real heir, an undoubted Popenjoy. But then, as often, the Dean showed him that he could not so withdraw himself.

“You will be driven,” said the Dean, “to express your belief, whatever it may be; and if you think that there has been foul play, you cannot deny that you think so.”

It was at last decided that Lord George should write a letter to his brother, giving all the grounds, not of his own suspicion, but which the world at large would have for suspecting; and earnestly imploring that proper evidence as to his brother’s marriage and as to the child’s birth, might be produced. Then, if this letter should not be attended to, a lawyer should be employed. The Dean named his own lawyer, Mr. Battle, of Lincoln’s Inn Fields. Lord George having once yielded, found it convenient to yield throughout. Towards the end of the interview the Dean suggested that he would “throw a few words together,” or, in other language, write the letter which his son-in-law would have to sign. This suggestion was also accepted by Lord George.

The two men were together for a couple of hours, and then, after lunch, went out together into the town. Each felt that he was now more closely bound to the other than ever. The Dean was thoroughly pleased that it should be so. He intended his son-in-law to be the Marquis, and being sanguine as well as pugnacious, looked forward to seeing that

time himself. Such a man as the Marquis would probably die early, whereas he himself was full of health. There was nothing he would not do to make Lord George's life pleasant, if only Lord George would be pleasant to him, and submissive. But Lord George himself was laden with many regrets. He had formed a conspiracy against the head of his own family, and his brother-conspirator was the son of a stable-keeper. It might be also that he was conspiring against his own legitimate nephew; and if so, the conspiracy would of course fail, and he would be stigmatised for ever among the Germaines as the most sordid and vile of the name.

The Dean's house was in the Close, joined on to the cathedral, a covered stone pathway running between the two. The nearest way from the Deanery to the High Street was through the cathedral, the transept of which could be entered by crossing the passage. The Dean and his son-in-law on this occasion went through the building to the west entrance, and there stood for a few minutes in the street while the Dean spoke to men who were engaged on certain repairs of the fabric. In doing this they all went out into the middle of the wide street in order that they might look up at the work which was being done. While they were there, suddenly an open carriage, with a postilion, came upon them unawares, and they had to retreat out of the way. As they did so they perceived that Lord Brotherton was in the carriage, enveloped in furs, and that a lady, more closely enveloped even than himself, was by his side. It was evident to them that he had

recognised them. Indeed he had been in the act of raising his hand to greet his brother when he saw the Dean. They both bowed to him, while the Dean, who had the readier mind, raised his hat to the lady. But the Marquis steadily ignored them.

"That's your sister-in-law," said the Dean.

"Perhaps so."

"There is no other lady here with whom he could be driving. I am pretty sure that it is the first time that either of them have been in Brotherton."

"I wonder whether he saw us."

"Of course he saw us. He cut me from fixed purpose, and you because I was with you. I shall not disturb him by any further recognition." Then they went on about their business, and in the afternoon, when the Dean had thrown his few words together, Lord George rode back to Cross Hall. "Let the letter be sent at once, but date it from London." These were the last words the Dean said to him.

It was the Marquis and his wife. All Brotherton heard the news. She had absolutely called at a certain shop, and the Marquis had condescended to be her interpreter. All Brotherton was now sure that there was a new Marchioness, a fact as to which a great part of Brotherton had hitherto entertained doubts. And it seemed that this act of condescension in stopping at a Brotherton shop was so much appreciated that all the former faults of the Marquis were to be condoned on that account. If only Popenjoy could be taken to a Brotherton pastry-

cook, and be got to eat a Brotherton bun, the Marquis would become the most popular man in the neighbourhood, and the undoubted progenitor of a long line of marquises to come. A little kindness after continued cruelty will always win a dog's heart; some say, also a woman's. It certainly seemed to be the way to win Brotherton.

CHAPTER III.

Lady Susanna in London.

IN spite of the caution which he had received from his friend and cousin Mrs. Houghton, Jack De Baron did go to Munster Court during the absence of Lord George, and there did encounter Lady Susanna. And Mrs. Houghton herself, though she had given such excellent advice, accompanied him. She was of course anxious to see Lady Susanna, who had always especially disliked her; and Jack himself was desirous of making the acquaintance of a lady who had been, he was assured, sent up to town on purpose to protect the young wife from his wiles. Both Mrs. Houghton and Jack had become very intimate in Munster Court, and there was nothing strange in their dropping in together, even before lunch. Jack was of course introduced to Lady Susanna. The two ladies grimaced at each other, each knowing the other's feeling towards herself. Mary having suspected that Lady Susanna had been sent for in reference to this special friend, determined on being specially gracious to Jack. She had already, since Lady Susanna's arrival, told that lady that she was able to manage her own little affairs. Lady Susanna had said an unfortunate word as to the unnecessary expense of four wax candles when they two were sitting alone in the drawing-room. Lady George had said that it was pretty.

Lady Susanna had expostulated gravely, and then Lady George had spoken out. "Dear Susanna, do let me manage my own little affairs." Of course the words had rankled, and of course the love which the ladies bore to each other had not been increased. Lady George was now quite resolved to show dear Susanna that she was not afraid of her duenna.

"We thought we'd venture to see if you'd give us lunch," said Mrs. Houghton.

"Delightful!" exclaimed Lady George. "There's nothing to eat; but you won't mind that."

"Not in the least," said Jack. "I always think the best lunch in the world is a bit of the servants' dinner. It's always the best meat, and the best cooked, and the hottest served."

There was plenty of lunch from whatsoever source it came, and the three young people were very merry. Perhaps they were a little noisy. Perhaps there was a little innocent slang in their conversation. Ladies do sometimes talk slang and perhaps the slang was encouraged for the special edification of Lady Susanna. But slang was never talked at Manor Cross or Cross Hall, and was odious to Lady Susanna. When Lady George declared that some offending old lady ought to be "jumped upon," Lady Susanna winced visibly. When Jack told Lady George that "she was the woman to do it," Lady Susanna shivered almost audibly. "Is anything the matter?" asked Lady George, perhaps not quite innocently.

It seemed to Lady Susanna that these visitors were never going away, and yet this was the very

man as to whom her brother had cautioned her! And what an odious man he was—in Lady Susanna's estimation! A puppy—an absolute puppy! Good-looking, impudent, familiar, with a light visage, and continually smiling! All those little gifts, which made him so pleasant to Lady George, were stains and blemishes in the eyes of Lady Susanna. To her thinking, a man—at any rate a gentleman—should be tall, dark, grave, and given to silence rather than to much talk. This Jack chattered about everything, and hardly opened his mouth without speaking slang. About half-past three, when they had been chattering in the drawing-room for an hour, after having chattered over their lunch for a previous hour, Mrs. Houghton made a most alarming proposition. "Let us all go to Berkeley Square and play bagatelle."

"By all means," said Jack. "Lady George, you owe me two new hats already."

Playing bagatelle for new hats! Lady Susanna felt that if ever there could come a time in which interference would be necessary that time had come now. She had resolved that she would be patient; that she should not come down as an offended deity upon Lady George, unless some sufficient crisis should justify such action. But now surely, if ever, she must interpose. Playing at bagatelle with Jack De Baron for new hats, and she with the prospect before her of being Marchioness of Brotherton! "It's only one," said Lady George, gaily, "and I daresay I'll win that back to-day. Will you come, Susanna?"

"Certainly not," said Lady Susanna, very grimly. They all looked at her, and Jack De Baron raised

his eyebrows, and sat for a moment motionless. Lady Susanna knew that Jack De Baron was intending to ridicule her. Then she remembered that should this perverse young woman insist upon going to Mrs. Houghton's house with so objectionable a companion, her duty to her brother demanded that she also should go. "I mean," said Lady Susanna, "that I had rather not go."

"Why not?" asked Mary.

"I do not think that playing bagatelle for new hats is—is—the best employment in the world either for a lady or for a gentleman." The words were hardly out of her mouth before she herself felt that they were overstrained and more than even this occasion demanded.

"Then we will only play for gloves," said Mary. Mary was not a woman to bear with impunity such an assault as had been made on her.

"Perhaps you will not mind giving it up till George comes back," said Lord George's sister.

"I shall mind very much. I will go up and get ready. You can do as you please." So Mary left the room, and Lady Susanna followed her.

"She means to have her own way," said Jack, when he was alone with his cousin. "She is not at all what I took her to be," said Mrs. Houghton. "The fact is, one cannot know what a girl is as long as a girl is a girl. It is only when she's married that she begins to speak out." Jack hardly agreed with this, thinking that some girls he had known had learned to speak out before they were married.

They all went out together to walk across the

parks to Berkeley Square, orders being left that the brougham should follow them later in the afternoon. Lady Susanna had at last resolved that she also would go. The very fact of her entering Mrs. Houghton's house was disagreeable to her; but she felt that duty called her. And, after all, when they got to Berkeley Square no bagatelle was played at all. But the bagatelle would almost have been better than what occurred. A small parcel was lying on the table which was found to contain a pack of pictured cards made for the telling of fortunes, and which some acquaintance had sent to Mrs. Houghton. With these they began telling each other's fortunes, and it seemed to Lady Susanna that they were all as free with lovers and sweethearts as though the two ladies had been housemaids instead of being the wives of steady, well-born husbands. "That's a dark man, with evil designs, a wicked tongue, and no money," said Mrs. Houghton, as a combination of cards lay in Lady George's lap. "Jack, the lady with light hair is only flirting with you. She doesn't care for you one bit."

"I daresay not," said Jack.

"And yet she'll trouble you awfully. Lady Susanna, will you have your fortune told?"

"No," said Lady Susanna, very shortly.

This went on for an hour before the brougham came, during the latter half of which Lady Susanna sat without once opening her lips. If any play could have been childish, it was this play; but to her it was horrible. And then they all sat so near together, and that man was allowed to put cards into

her brother's wife's hand and to take them out just as though they had been brother and sister, or playfellows all their days. And then, as they were going down to the brougham, the odious man got Lady George aside and whispered to her for two minutes. Lady Susanna did not hear a word of their whispers, but knew that they were devilish. And so she would have thought if she had heard them. "You're going to catch it, Lady George," Jack had said. "There's somebody else will catch something if she makes herself disagreeable," Lady George had answered. "I wish I could be invisible and hear it," had been Jack's last words.

"My dear Mary," said Lady Susanna, as soon as they were seated, "you are very young."

"That's a fault that will mend of itself."

"Too quickly, as you will soon find; but in the meantime, as you are a married woman, should you not be careful to guard against the indiscretions of youth?"

"Well, yes; I suppose I ought," said Mary, after a moment of mock consideration. "But then if I were unmarried I ought to do just the same. It's a kind of thing that is a matter of course without talking about it." She had firmly made up her mind that she would submit in no degree to Lady Susanna, and take from her no scolding. Indeed, she had come to a firm resolve long since that she would be scolded by no one but her husband—and by him as little as possible. Now she was angry with him because he had sent this woman to watch her, and was determined that he should know that, though

she would submit to him, she would not submit to his sister. The moment for asserting herself had now come.

"A young married woman," said the duenna, "owes it to her husband to be peculiarly careful. She has his happiness and his honour in her hands."

"And he has hers. It seems to me that all these things are matters of course."

"They should be, certainly," said Lady Susanna, hardly knowing how to go on with her work; a little afraid of her companion, but still very intent. "But it will sometimes happen that a young person does not quite know what is right and what is wrong."

"And sometimes it happens that old people don't know. There was Major Jones had his wife taken away from him the other day by the Court because he was always beating her, and he was fifty. I read all about it in the papers. I think the old people are just as bad as the young."

Lady Susanna felt that her reproaches were being cut off from her, and that she must rush at once against the citadel if she meant to take it. "Do you think that playing bagatelle is—nice?"

"Yes I do; very nice."

"Do you think George would like your playing with Captain De Baron?"

"Why not with Captain De Baron?" said Mary, turning round upon her assailant with absolute ferocity.

"I don't think he would like it. And then that fortune-telling! If you will believe me, Mary, it was very improper."

"I will not believe anything of the kind. Improper! a joke about a lot of picture-cards!"

"It was all about love and lovers," said Lady Susanna, not quite knowing how to express herself, but still sure that she was right.

"Oh, what a mind you must have, Susanna, to pick wrong out of that! All about love and lovers! So are books and songs and plays at the theatre. I suppose you didn't understand that it was intended as a burlesque on fortune telling?"

"And I am quite sure George wouldn't like the kind of slang you were talking with Captain De Baron at lunch."

"If George does not like anything he had better tell me so, and not depute you to do it for him. If he tells me to do anything I shall do it. If you tell me I shall pay no attention to it whatever. You are here as my guest, and not as my governess; and I think your interference very impertinent." This was strong language—so strong that Lady Susanna found it impossible to continue the conversation at that moment. Nothing, indeed, was said between them during the whole afternoon, or at dinner, or in the evening—till Lady Susanna had taken up her candlestick.

There had been that most clearly declared of all war which is shown by absolute silence. But Lady Susanna, as she was retiring to rest, thought it might be wise to make a little effort after peace. She did not at all mean to go back from what charges she had made. She had no idea of owning herself to be wrong. But perhaps she could throw a little oil

upon the waters. "Of course," she said, "I should not have spoken as I have done but for my great love for George and my regard for you."

"As far as I am concerned, I think it a mistaken regard," said Mary. "Of course I shall tell George; but even to him I shall say that I will not endure any authority but his own."

"Will you hear me?"

"No, not on this subject. You have accused me of behaving improperly—with that man."

"I do think," began Lady Susanna, not knowing how to pick her words in this emergency, fearing to be too strong, and at the same time conscious that weakness would be folly, "I do think that anything like—like—like flirting is so very bad!"

"Susanna," said Lady George, with a start as she heard the odious words, "as far as I can help it, I will never speak to you again." There certainly had been no oil thrown upon the waters as yet.

The next day was passed almost in absolute silence. It was the Friday, and each of them knew that Lord George would be home on the morrow. The interval was so short that nothing could be gained by writing to him. Each had her own story to tell, and each must wait till he should be there to hear it. Mary with a most distant civility went through her work of hostess. Lady Susanna made one or two little efforts to subdue her; but, failing, soon gave up the endeavour. In the afternoon Aunt Ju called with her niece, but their conversation did not lessen the breach. Then Lady Susanna went out alone in the brougham; but that had been ar-

ranged beforehand. They ate their dinner in silence, in silence read their books, and met in silence at the breakfast-table. At three o'clock Lord George came home, and then Mary, running downstairs, took him with her into the drawing-room. There was one embrace, and then she began. "George," she said, "you must never have Susanna here again."

"Why?" said he.

"She has insulted me. She has said things so nasty that I cannot repeat them, even to you. She has accused me to my face—of flirting. I won't bear it from her. If you said it, it would kill me; but of course you can say what you please. But she shall not scold me, and tell me that I am this and that because I am not as solemn as she is, George. Do you believe that I have ever—flirted?" She was so impetuous that he had been quite unable to stop her. "Did you mean that she should behave to me like that?"

"This is very bad," he said.

"What is very bad? Is it not bad that she should say such things to me as that? Are you going to take her part against me?"

"Dearest Mary, you seem to be excited."

"Of course I am excited. Would you wish me to have such things as that said to me, and not to be excited? You are not going to take part against me?"

"I have not heard her yet."

"Will you believe her against me? Will she be

able to make you believe that I have—flirted? If so, then it is all over."

"What is all over?"

"Oh George, why did you marry me, if you cannot trust me?"

"Who says that I do not trust you? I suppose the truth is you have been a little—flighty."

"Been what? I suppose you mean the same thing. I have talked and laughed, and been amused, if that means being flighty. She thinks it wicked to laugh, and calls it slang if every word doesn't come out of the grammar. You had better go and hear her, since you will say nothing more to me."

Lord George thought so too; but he stayed for a few moments in the dining-room, during which he stooped over his wife, who had thrown herself into an arm-chair, and kissed her. As he did so, she merely shook her head, but made no response to his caress. Then he slowly strode away, and went upstairs into the drawing-room.

What took place there need not be recorded at length. Lady Susanna did not try to be mischievous. She spoke much of Mary's youth, and expressed a strong opinion that Captain De Baron was not a fit companion for her. She was very urgent against the use of slang, and said almost harder things of Mrs. Houghton than she did of Jack. She never had meant to imply that Mary had allowed improper attention from the gentleman, but that Mary, being young, had not known what attentions were proper and what improper. To Lady Susanna the whole matter was so serious that she altogether dropped

the personal quarrel. "Of course, George," she said, "young people do not like to be told; but it has to be done. And I must say that Mary likes it as little as any person that I have ever known."

This multiplicity of troubles falling together on to the poor man's back almost crushed him. He had returned to town full of that terrible letter which he had pledged himself to write; but the letter was already driven out of his head for the time. It was essentially necessary that he should compose this domestic trouble, and of course he returned to his wife. Equally of course after a little time she prevailed. He had to tell her that he was sure that she never flirted. He had to say that she did not talk slang. He had to protest that the fortunetelling cards were absolutely innocent. Then she condescended to say that she would for the present be civil to Susanna, but even while saying that she protested that she would never again have her sister-in-law as a guest in the house.

"You don't know, George, even yet, all that she said to me, or in what sort of way she behaved."

CHAPTER IV.

The Dean returns to Town.

"Do you mean to say that you have any objection to my being acquainted with Captain De Baron?" This question Mary asked her husband on the Monday after his return. On that day Lady Susanna went back to Brothershire, having somewhat hurried her return in consequence of the uncomfortable state of things in Munster Court. They had all gone to church together on the intermediate Sunday, and Lady Susanna had done her best to conciliate her sister-in-law. But she was ignorant of the world, and did not know how bitter to a young married woman is such interference as that of which she had been guilty. She could not understand the amount of offence which was rankling in Mary's bosom. It had not consisted only in the words spoken, but her looks in the man's presence had conveyed the same accusation, so that it could be seen and understood by the man himself. Mary, with an effort, had gone on with her play, determined that no one should suppose her to be cowed by her grand sister-in-law; but through it all she had resolved always to look upon Lady Susanna as an enemy. She had already abandoned her threat of not speaking to her own guest; but nothing that Lady Susanna could say, nothing that Lord George could say, softened her heart in the

least. The woman had told her that she was a flirt, had declared that what she did and said was improper. The woman had come there as a spy, and the woman should never be her friend. In these circumstances Lord George found it impossible not to refer to the unfortunate subject again, and in doing so caused the above question to be asked. "Do you mean to say that you have any objection to my being acquainted with Captain De Baron?" She looked at him with so much eagerness in her eyes as she spoke that he knew that much at any rate of his present comfort might depend on the answer which he made.

He certainly did object to her being acquainted with Jack De Baron. He did not at all like Jack De Baron. In spite of what he had found himself obliged to say, in order that she might be comforted on his first arrival, he did not like slang, and he did not like fortune-telling cards or bagatelle. His sympathies in these matters were all with his sister. He did like spending his own time with Mrs. Houghton, but it was dreadful to him to think that his wife should be spending hers with Jack de Baron. Nevertheless he could not tell her so.

"No," he said, "I have no particular objection."

"Of course, if you had, I would never see him again. But it would be very dreadful. He would have to be told that you were—jealous."

"I am not in the least jealous," said he, angrily. "You should not use such a word."

"Certainly I should not have used it, but for the disturbance which your sister has caused. But

after all that has been said there must be some understanding. I like Captain De Baron very much, as I daresay you like other ladies. Why not?"

"I have never suspected anything."

"But Susanna did. Of course you don't like all this, George. I don't like it. I have been so miserable that I have almost cried my eyes out. But if people will make mischief, what is one to do? The only thing is not to have the mischief-maker any more."

The worst of this was, to him, that she was so manifestly getting the better of him! When he had married her, not yet nine months since, she had been a little girl, altogether in his hands, not pretending to any self-action, and anxious to be guided in everything by him. His only fear had been that she might be too slow in learning that self-assertion which is necessary from a married woman to the world at large. But now she had made very great progress in the lesson, not only as regarded the world at large, but as regarded himself also. As for his family—the grandeur of his family—she clearly had no reverence for that. Lady Susanna, though generally held to be very awful, had been no more to her than any other Susan. He almost wished that he had told her that he did object to Jack De Baron. There would have been a scene, of course; and she, not improbably, might have told her father. That at present would have been doubly disagreeable, as it was incumbent upon him to stand well with the Dean, just at this time. There was this battle to be fought with his brother,

and he felt that he could not fight it without the Dean.

Having given his sanction to Jack De Baron, he went away to his club to write his letter. This writing really amounted to no more than copying the Dean's words, which he had carried in his pocket ever since he had left the Deanery, and the Dean's words were as follows:

"Munster Court, 26th April, 187—.

"MY DEAR BROTHERTON,—I am compelled to write to you under very disagreeable circumstances, and to do so on a subject which I would willingly avoid if a sense of duty would permit me to be silent.

"You will remember that you wrote to me in October last, telling me that you were about to be married. 'I am to be married to the Marchesa Luigi' were your words. Up to that moment we had heard nothing of the lady or of any arrangement as to a marriage. When I told you of my own intended marriage a few months before that, you merely said in answer that you might probably soon want the house at Manor Cross yourself. It now seems that when you told us of your intended marriage you had already been married over two years, and that when I told you of mine you had a son over twelve months old—a fact which I might certainly expect that you would communicate to me at such time.

"I beg to assure you that I am now urged to write by no suspicions of my own; but I know that

if things are left to go on as they are now, suspicions will arise at a future time. I write altogether in the interests of your son and heir; and for his sake I beseech you to put at once into the hands of your own lawyer absolute evidence of the date of your marriage, of its legality, and of the birth of your son. It will also be expedient that my lawyer shall see the evidence in your lawyer's hands. If you were to die as matters are now, it would be imperative on me to take steps which would seem to be hostile to Popenjoy's interest. I think you must yourself feel that this would be so. And yet nothing would be farther from my wish. If we were both to die, the difficulty would be still greater, as in that case proceedings would have to be taken by more distant members of the family.

"I trust you will believe me when I say that my only object is to have the matter satisfactorily settled.

"Your affectionate brother,
"GEORGE GERMAIN."

When the Marquis received this letter he was not in the least astonished by it. Lord George had told his sister Sarah that it was to be written, and had even discussed with her the Dean's words. Lady Sarah had thought that as the Dean was a sagacious man, his exact words had better be used. And then Lady Amelia had been told, Lady Amelia having asked various questions on the subject. Lady Amelia had of course known that her brother would discuss the matter with the Dean, and had begged

that she might not be treated as a stranger. Everything had not been told to Lady Amelia, nor had Lady Amelia told all that she had heard to her mother. But the Marchioness had known enough, and had communicated enough to her son to save him from any great astonishment when he got his brother's letter. Of course he had known that some steps would be taken.

He answered the letter at once.

"MY DEAR BROTHER," he said,—"I don't think it necessary to let you know the reasons which induced me to keep my marriage private awhile. You rush at conclusions very fast in thinking that because a marriage is private, therefore it is illegal. I am glad that you have no suspicions of your own, and beg to assure you I don't care whether you have or not. Whenever you or anybody else may want to try the case, you, or he, or they will find that I have taken care that there is plenty of evidence. I didn't know that you had a lawyer. I only hope he won't run you into much expense in finding a mare's nest.

"Yours truly,

"B."

This was not in itself satisfactory; but, such as it was, it did for a time make Lord George believe that Popenjoy was Popenjoy. It was certainly true of him that he wished Popenjoy to be Popenjoy. No personal longing for the title or property made him in his heart disloyal to his brother or his

family. And then the trouble and expense and anxieties of such a contest were so terrible to his imagination that he rejoiced when he thought that they might be avoided. But there was the Dean. The Dean must be satisfied as well as he, and he felt that the Dean would not be satisfied. According to agreement he sent a copy of his brother's letter down to the Dean, and added the assurance of his own belief that the marriage had been a marriage, that the heir was an heir, and that further steps would be useless. It need hardly be said that the Dean was not satisfied. Before dinner on the following day the Dean was in Munster Court. "Oh papa," exclaimed Mary, "I am so glad to see you." Could it be anything about Captain De Baron that had brought him up? If so, of course she would tell him everything. "What brought you up so suddenly? Why didn't you write? George is at the club, I suppose." George was really in Berkeley Square at that moment. "Oh yes; he will be home to dinner. Is there anything wrong at Manor Cross, papa?" Her father was so pleasant in his manner to her, that she perceived at once that he had not come up in reference to Captain De Baron. No complaint of her behaviour on that score had as yet reached him. "Where's your portmanteau, papa?"

"I've got a bed at the hotel in Suffolk Street. I shall only be here one night, or at the most two; and as I had to come suddenly I wouldn't trouble you."

"Oh papa, that's very bad of you."

This she said with that genuine tone which begets confidence. The Dean was very anxious that his daughter should in truth be fond of his company. In the game which he intended to play her co-operation and her influence over her husband would be very necessary to him. She must be a Lovelace rather than a Germain till she should blaze forth as the presiding genius of the Germain family. That Lord George should become tired of him and a little afraid of him he knew could not be avoided; but to her he must, if possible, be a pleasant genius, never accompanied in her mind by ideas of parental severity or clerical heaviness. "I should weary you out if I came too often and come so suddenly," he said laughing.

"But what has brought you, papa?"

"The Marquis, my dear, who, it seems to me, will, for some time to come, have a considerable influence on my doings."

"The Marquis!"

He had made up his mind that she should know everything. If her husband did not tell her, he would. "Yes, the Marquis. Perhaps I ought to say the Marchioness, only that I am unwilling to give that title to a lady who I think very probably has no right to it."

"Is all that coming up already?"

"The longer it is postponed the greater will be the trouble to all parties. It cannot be endured that a man in his position should tell us that his son is legitimate when that son was born more than a year before he had declared himself about to marry, and

that he should then refuse to furnish us with any evidence."

"Have you asked him?" Mary, as she made the suggestion, was herself horror-stricken at the awfulness of the occasion.

"George has asked him."

"And what has the Marquis done?"

"Sent him back a jeering reply. He has a way of jeering which he thinks will carry everything before it. When I called upon him he jeered at me. But he'll have to learn that he cannot jeer you out of your rights."

"I wish you would not think about my rights, papa."

"Your rights will probably be the rights of someone else."

"I know, papa; but still——"

"It has to be done, and George quite agrees with me. The letter which he did write to his brother was arranged between us. Lady Sarah is quite of the same accord, and Lady Susanna——"

"Oh papa, I do so hate Susanna." This she said with all her eloquence.

"I daresay she can make herself unpleasant."

"I have told George that she shall not come here again as a guest."

"What did she do?"

"I cannot bring myself to tell you what it was that she said. I told George, of course. She is a nasty evil-minded creature—suspecting everything."

"I hope there has been nothing disagreeable."

"It was very disagreeable, indeed, while George

was away. Of course I did not care so much when he came back." The Dean, who had been almost frightened, was reassured when he learned that there had been no quarrel between the husband and wife. Soon afterwards Lord George came in and was astonished to find that his letter had brought up the Dean so quickly. No discussion took place till after dinner, but then the Dean was very perspicuous, and at the same time very authoritative. It was in vain that Lord George asked what they could do, and declared that the evil troubles which must probably arise would all rest on his brother's head. "But we must prevent such troubles, let them rest where they will," said the Dean.

"I don't see what we can do."

"Nor do I, because we are not lawyers. A lawyer will tell us at once. It will probably be our duty to send a commissioner out to Italy to make inquiry."

"I shouldn't like to do that about my brother."

"Of course your brother should be told; or rather everything should be told to your brother's lawyer, so that he might be advised what steps he ought to take. We would do nothing secretly—nothing of which anyone could say that we ought to be ashamed." The Dean proposed that they should both go to his attorney, Mr. Battle, on the following day; but this step seemed to Lord George to be such an absolute declaration of war that he begged for another day's delay; and it was at last arranged that he himself should on that intervening day call on Mr. Stokes, the Germain family lawyer.

The Marquis, with one of his jeers, had told his brother that, being a younger brother, he was not entitled to have a lawyer. But in truth Lord George had had very much more to do with Mr. Stokes than the Marquis. All the concerns of the family had been managed by Mr. Stokes. The Marquis probably meant to insinuate that the family bill, which was made out perhaps once every three years, was charged against his account. Lord George did call on Mr. Stokes, and found Mr. Stokes very little disposed to give him any opinion. Mr. Stokes was an honest man who disliked trouble of this kind. He freely admitted that there was ground for inquiry, but did not think that he himself was the man who ought to make it. He would certainly communicate with the Marquis, should Lord George think it expedient to employ any other lawyer, and should that lawyer apply to him. In the meantime he thought that immediate inquiry would be a little precipitate. The Marquis might probably himself take steps to put the matter on a proper footing. He was civil, gracious, almost subservient; but he had no comfort to give and no advice to offer, and, like all attorneys, he was in favour of delay. "Of course, Lord George, you must remember that I am your brother's lawyer, and may in this matter be called upon to act as his confidential adviser." All this Lord George repeated that evening to the Dean, and the Dean merely said that it had been a matter of course.

Early on the next morning the Dean and Lord George went together to Mr. Battle's chambers.

Lord George felt that he was being driven by his father-in-law; but he felt also that he could not help himself. Mr. Battle, who had chambers in Lincoln's Inn, was a very different man from Mr. Stokes, who carried on his business in a private house at the West End, who prepared wills and marriage settlements for gentlefolk, and who had, in fact, very little to do with law. Mr. Battle was an enterprising man, with whom the Dean's first acquaintance had arisen through the Tallowaxes and the stable interests—a very clever man, and perhaps a little sharp. But an attorney ought to be sharp, and it is not to be understood that Mr. Battle descended to sharp practice. But he was a solicitor with whom the old-fashioned Mr. Stokeses would not find themselves in accord. He was a handsome burly man, nearly sixty years of age, with gray hair and clean shorn face, with bright green eyes, and a well-formed nose and mouth—a prepossessing man, till something restless about the eyes would at last catch the attention and a little change the judgment.

The Dean told him the story, and during the telling he sat looking very pleasant, with a smile on his face, rubbing his two hands together. All the points were made. The letter of the Marquis, in which he told his brother that he was to be married, was shown to him. The concealment of the birth of the boy till the father had made up his mind to come home was urged. The absurdity of his behaviour since he had been at home was described. The singularity of his conduct in allowing none of his family to become acquainted with his wife was

pointed out. This was done by the Dean rather than by Lord George, and Lord George, as he heard it all, almost regarded the Dean as his enemy. At last he burst out in his own defence. "Of course you will understand, Mr. Battle, that our only object is to have the thing proved, so that hereafter there may be no trouble."

"Just so, my lord."

"We do not want to oppose my brother, or to injure his child."

"We want to get at the truth," said the Dean.

"Just so."

"Where there is concealment there must be suspicion," urged the Dean.

"No doubt."

"But everything must be done quite openly," said Lord George. "I would not have a step taken without the knowledge of Mr. Stokes. If Mr. Stokes would do it himself on my brother's behalf it would be so much the better."

"That is hardly probable," said the Dean.

"Not at all probable," said Mr. Battle.

"I couldn't be a party to an adverse suit," said Lord George.

"There is no ground for any suit at all," said the lawyer. "We cannot bring an action against the Marquis because he chooses to call the lady he lives with a Marchioness, or because he calls an infant Lord Popenjoy. Your brother's conduct may be ill-judged. From what you tell me, I think it is. But it is not criminal."

"Then nothing need be done," said Lord George.

"A great deal may be done. Inquiry may be made now which might hereafter be impossible." Then he begged that he might have a week to consider the matter, and requested that the two gentlemen would call upon him again.

CHAPTER V.

The Baroness Banmann again.

A DAY or two after the meeting at Mr. Battle's office there came to Lord George a letter from that gentleman suggesting that, as the Dean had undertaken to come up to London again, and as he, Mr. Battle, might not be ready with his advice at the end of a week, that day fortnight might be fixed. To Lord George this delay was agreeable rather than otherwise, as he was not specially anxious for the return of his father-in-law, nor was he longing for action in this question as to his brother's heir. But the Dean, when the lawyer's letter reached him, was certain that Mr. Battle did not seem to lose the time simply in thinking over the matter. Some preliminary inquiry would now be made, even though no positive instructions had been given. He did not at all regret this, but was sure that Lord George would be very angry if he knew it. He wrote back to say that he would be in Munster Court on the evening before the day appointed.

It was now May, and London was bright with all the exotic gaiety of the season. The Park was crowded with riders at one, and was almost impassable at six. Dress was outvying dress, and equipage equipage. Men and women, but principally women, seemed to be intent on finding out new

ways of scattering money. Tradesmen no doubt knew much of defaulters, and heads of families might find themselves pressed for means; but to the outside West-end eye looking at the outside West-end world it seemed as though wealth was unlimited and money a drug. To those who had known the thing for years, to young ladies who were now entering on their seventh or eighth campaign, there was a feeling of business about it all which, though it buoyed them up by its excitement, robbed amusement of most of its pleasure. A ball cannot be very agreeable in which you may not dance with the man you like and are not asked by the man you want; at which you are forced to make a note that that full-blown hope is futile, and that this little bud will surely never come to flower. And then the toil of smiles, the pretence at flirtation, the long-continued assumption of fictitious character, the making of oneself bright to the bright, solemn to the solemn, and romantic to the romantic, is work too hard for enjoyment. But our heroine had no such work to do. She was very much admired and could thoroughly enjoy the admiration. She had no task to perform. She was not carrying out her profession by midnight labours. Who shall say whether now and again a soft impalpable regret—a regret not recognised as such—may not have stolen across her mind, telling her that if she had seen all this before she was married instead of afterwards, she might have found a brighter lot for herself? If it were so, the only enduring effect of such a feeling was a renewal of that oft-made resolution that she

would be in love with her husband. The ladies whom she knew had generally their carriages and riding horses. She had only a brougham, and had that kept for her by the generosity of her father. The Dean, when coming to town, had brought with him the horse which she used to ride, and wished that it should remain. But Lord George, with a husband's solicitude, and perhaps with something of a poor man's proper dislike to expensive habits, had refused his permission. She soon, too, learned to know the true sheen of diamonds, the luxury of pearls, and the richness of rubies; whereas she herself wore only the little ornaments which had come from the Deanery. And as she danced in spacious rooms and dined in noble halls, and was *fêted* on grand staircases, she remembered what a little place was the little house in Munster Court, and that she was to stay there only for a few weeks more before she was taken to the heavy dulness of Cross Hall. But still she always came back to that old resolution. She was so flattered, so courted, so petted and made much of, that she could not but feel that had all this world been opened to her sooner her destiny would probably have been different; but then it might have been different, and very much less happy. She still told herself that she was sure that Lord George was all that he ought to be.

Two or three things did tease her certainly. She was very fond of balls, but she soon found that Lord George disliked them as much, and when present was always anxious to get home. She was a married woman, and it was open to her to go alone;

but that she did not like, nor would he allow it. Sometimes she joined herself to other parties. Mrs. Houghton was always ready to be her companion, and old Mrs. Montacute Jones, who went everywhere, had taken a great liking to her. But there were two antagonistic forces, her husband and herself, and of course she had to yield to the stronger force. The thing might be managed occasionally—and the occasion was no doubt much the pleasanter because it had to be so managed—but there was always the feeling that these bright glimpses of Paradise, these entrances into Elysium, were not free to her as to other ladies. And then one day, or rather one night, there came a great sorrow—a sorrow which robbed these terrestrial Paradises of half their brightness and more than half their joy. One evening he told her that he did not like her to waltz. "Why?" she innocently asked. They were in the brougham, going home, and she had been supremely happy at Mrs. Montacute Jones's house. Lord George said that he could hardly explain the reason. He made rather a long speech, in which he asked her whether she was not aware that many married women did not waltz. "No," said she. "That is, of course, when they get old they don't." "I am sure," said he, "that when I say I do not like it, that will be enough." "Quite enough," she answered, "to prevent my doing it, though not enough to satisfy me why it should not be done." He said no more to her on the occasion, and so the matter was considered to be settled. Then she remembered that her very last waltz had been with Jack De Baron. Could it be

that he was jealous? She was well aware that she took great delight in waltzing with Captain De Baron because he waltzed so well. But now that pleasure was over, and for ever! Was it that her husband disliked waltzing, or that he disliked Jack De Baron?

A few days after this Lady George was surprised by a visit from the Baroness Banmann, the lady whom she had been taken to hear at the Disabilities. Since that memorable evening she had seen Aunt Ju more than once, and had asked how the cause of the female architects was progressing; but she had never again met the Baroness. Aunt Ju had apparently been disturbed by these questions. She had made no further effort to make Lady George a proselyte by renewed attendance at the Rights of Women Institute, and had seemed almost anxious to avoid the subject. As Lady George's acquaintance with the Baroness had been owing altogether to Aunt Ju she was now surprised that the German lady should call upon her.

The German lady began a story with great impetuosity—with so much impetuosity that poor Mary could not understand half that was said to her. But she did learn that the Baroness had in her own estimation been very ill-treated, and that the ill-treatment had come mainly from the hands of Aunt Ju and Lady Selina Protest. And it appeared at length that the Baroness claimed to have been brought over from Bavaria with a promise that she should have the exclusive privilege of using the hall of the Disabilities on certain evenings, but that this

privilege was now denied to her. The Disabilities seemed to prefer her younger rival, Miss Doctor Olivia Q. Fleabody, whom Mary now learned to be a person of no good repute whatever, and by no means fit to address the masses of Marylebone. But what did the Baroness want of her? What with the female lecturer's lack of English pronunciation, what with her impetuosity, and with Mary's own innocence on the matter, it was some time before the younger lady did understand what the elder lady required. At last eight tickets were brought out of her pocket, on looking at which Mary began to understand that the Baroness had established a rival Disabilities, very near the other, in Lisson Grove; and then at last, but very gradually, she further understood that these were front-row tickets, and were supposed to be worth half-a-crown each. But it was not till after that, till further explanation had been made which must, she feared, have been very painful to the Baroness, that she began to perceive that she was expected to pay for the eight tickets on the moment. She had a sovereign in her pocket, and was quite willing to sacrifice it; but she hardly knew how to hand the coin bodily to a Baroness. When she did do so, the Baroness very well knew how to put it into her pocket. "You will like to keep the entire eight?" asked the Baroness. Mary thought that four might perhaps suffice for her own wants; whereupon the Baroness re-pocketed four, but of course did not return the change.

But even then the Baroness had not completed her task. Aunt Ju had evidently been false and

treacherous, but might still be won back to loyal honesty. So much Mary gradually perceived to be the drift of the lady's mind. Lady Selina was hopeless. Lady Selina, whom the Baroness intended to drag before all the judges in England, would do nothing fair or honest; but Aunt Ju might yet be won. Would Lady George go with the Baroness to Aunt Ju? The servant had unfortunately just announced the brougham as being at the door. "Ah," said the Baroness, "it vould be ten minutes, and vould be my salvation." Lady George did not at all want to go to the house in Green Street. She had no great desire to push her acquaintance with Aunt Ju, she particularly disliked the younger Miss Mildmay, and she felt that she had no business to interfere in this matter. But there is nothing which requires so much experience to attain as the power of refusing. Almost before she had made up her mind whether she would refuse or not the Baroness was in the brougham with her, and the coachman had been desired to take them to Green Street. Throughout the whole distance the Baroness was voluble and unintelligible; but Lady George could hear the names of Selina Protest and Olivia Q. Fleabody through the thunder of the lady's loud complaints.

Yes, Miss Mildmay was at home. Lady George gave her name to the servant, and also especially requested that the Baroness Banmann might be first announced. She had thought it over in the brougham, and had determined that if possible it should appear that the Baroness had brought her.

Twice she repeated the name to the servant. When they reached the drawing-room only the younger Miss Mildmay was present. She sent the servant to her aunt, and received her two visitors very demurely. With the Baroness, of whom probably she had heard quite enough, she had no sympathies; and with Lady George she had her own special ground of quarrel. Five or six very long minutes passed during which little or nothing was said. The Baroness did not wish to expend her eloquence on an unprofitable young lady, and Lady George could find no subject for small talk. At last the door was opened and the servant invited the Baroness to go downstairs. The Baroness had perhaps been unfortunate, for at this very time Lady Selina Protest was down in the dining-room discussing the affairs of the Institute with Aunt Ju. There was a little difficulty in making the lady understand what was required of her, but after awhile she did follow the servant down to the dining-room.

Lady George, as soon as the door was closed, felt that the blood rushed to her face. She was conscious at the moment that Captain de Baron had been the girl's lover, and there were some who said that it was because of her that he had deserted the girl. The girl had already said words to her on the subject which had been very hard to bear. She had constantly told herself that in this matter she was quite innocent—that her friendship with Jack was simple, pure friendship, that she liked him because he laughed and talked and

treated the world lightly; that she rarely saw him except in the presence of his cousin, and that everything was as it ought to be. And yet, when she found herself alone with this Miss Mildmay, she was suffused with blushes, and uneasy. She felt that she ought to make some excuse for her visit. "I hope," she said, "that your aunt will understand that I brought the lady here only because she insisted on being brought." Miss Mildmay bowed. "She came to me, and I really couldn't quite understand what she had to say. But the brougham was there, and she would get into it. I am afraid there has been some quarrel."

"I don't think that matters at all," said Miss Mildmay.

"Only your aunt might think it so impertinent of me! She took me to that Institute once, you know."

"I don't know anything about the Institute. As for the German woman, she is an impostor, but it doesn't matter. There are three of them there now, and they can have it out together."

Lady George didn't understand whether her companion meant to blame her for coming, but was quite sure, from the tone of the girl's voice and the look of her eyes, that she meant to be uncivil.

"I am surprised," continued Miss Mildmay, "that you should come to this house at all."

"I hope your aunt will not think——"

"Never mind my aunt. The house is more my

house than my aunt's. After what you have done to me——”

“What have I done to you?” She could not help asking the question, and yet she well knew the nature of the accusation. And she could not stop the rushing of the tell-tale blood.

Augusta Mildmay was blushing too, but the blush on her face consisted in two red spots beneath the eyes. The determination to say what she was going to say had come upon her suddenly. She had not thought that she was about to meet her rival. She had planned nothing; but now she was determined.

“What have you done?” she said. “You know very well what you have done. Do you mean to tell me that you had never heard of anything between me and Captain De Baron? Will you dare to tell me that? Why don't you answer me, Lady George Germain?”

This was a question which she did not wish to answer, and one that did not at all appertain to herself—which did not require any answer for the clearing of herself; but yet it was now asked in such a manner that she could not save herself from answering it.

“I think I did hear that you and he—knew each other.”

“Knew each other! Don't be so mealy-mouthed. I don't mean to be mealy-mouthed, I can tell you. You knew all about it. Adelaide has told you. You knew that we were engaged.”

"No," exclaimed Lady George; "she never told me that."

"She did. I know she did. She confessed to me that she had told you so."

"But what if she had?"

"Of course he is nothing to you," said the young lady with a sneer.

"Nothing at all—nothing on earth. How dare you ask such a question? If Captain de Baron is engaged, I can't make him keep his engagements."

"You can make him break them."

"That is not true. I can make him do nothing of the kind. You have no right to talk to me in this way, Miss Mildmay."

"Then I shall do it without a right. You have come between me and all my happiness."

"You cannot know that I am a married woman," said Lady George, speaking half in innocence and half in anger, almost out of breath with confusion, "or you wouldn't speak like that."

"Psha!" exclaimed Miss Mildmay. "It is nothing to me whether you are married or single. I care nothing though you have twenty lovers, if you do not interfere with me."

"It is a falsehood," said Lady George, who was now standing. "I have no lover. It is a wicked falsehood."

"I care nothing for wickedness or falseness either. Will you promise me if I hold my tongue that you will have nothing further to say to Captain De Baron?"

"No; I will promise nothing. I should be ashamed of myself to make such a promise."

"Then I shall go to Lord George. I do not want to make mischief, but I am not going to be treated in this way. How would you like it? When I tell you that the man is engaged to me why cannot you leave him alone?"

"I do leave him alone," said Mary, stamping her foot.

"You do everything you can to cheat me of him. I shall tell Lord George."

"You may tell whom you like," said Mary, rushing to the bell-handle and pulling it with all her might. "You have insulted me, and I will never speak to you again." Then she burst out crying, and hurried to the door. "Will you—get me—my—carriage?" she said to the man through her sobs. As she descended the stairs she remembered that she had brought the German baroness with her, and that the German baroness would probably expect to be taken away again. But when she reached the hall the door of the dining-room burst open, and the German baroness appeared. It was evident that two scenes had been going on in the same house at the same moment. Through the door the Baroness came first, waving her hands above her head. Behind her was Aunt Ju, advancing with imploring gesture. And behind Aunt Ju might be seen Lady Selina Protest standing in mute dignity.

"It is all a got-up cheating and a fraud," said the Baroness; "and I will have justice—English justice."

The servant was standing with the front door open, and the Baroness went straight into Lady George's brougham, as though it had been her own.

"Oh Lady George," said Aunt Ju, "what are you to do with her?"

But Lady George was so taken up with her own trouble that she could hardly think of the other matter. She had to say something.

"Perhaps I had better go with her. Good-bye." And then she followed the Baroness.

"I did not tink dere was such robbery with ladies," said the Baroness.

But the footman was asking for directions for the coachman. Whither was he to go?

"I do not care," said the Baroness.

Lady George asked her in a whisper whether she would be taken home.

"Anywhere," said the Baroness.

In the meantime the footman was still standing, and Aunt Ju could be seen in the hall through the open door of the house. During the whole time our poor Mary's heart was crushed by the accusations which had been made against her upstairs.

"Home," said Mary in despair. To have the Baroness in Munster Court would be dreadful; but anything was better than standing in Green Street with the servant at the carriage window.

Then the Baroness began her story. Lady Selina Protest had utterly refused to do her justice, and Aunt Ju was weak enough to be domineered by Lady Selina. That, as far as Mary understood anything about it, was the gist of the story. But she

did not try to understand anything about it. During the drive her mind was intent on forming some plan by which she might be able to get rid of her companion without asking her into her house. She had paid her sovereign, and surely the Baronesss had no right to demand more of her. When she reached Munster Court her plan was in some sort framed. "And now, madam," she said, "where shall I tell my servant to take you?" The Baroness looked very suppliant. "If you vas not busy I should so like just one half-hour of conversation." Mary nearly yielded. For a moment she hesitated as though she were going to put up her hand and help the lady out. But then the memory of her own unhappiness steeled her heart, and the feeling grew strong within her that this nasty woman was imposing on her—and she refused. "I am afraid, madam," she said, "that my time is altogether occupied." "Then let him take me to 10, Alexandrina Row, Maida Vale," said the Baroness, throwing herself sulkily back into the carriage. Lady George gave the direction to the astounded coachman—for Maida Vale was a long way off—and succeeded in reaching her own drawing-room alone.

What was she to do? The only course in which there seemed to be safety was in telling all to her husband. If she did not, it would probably be told by the cruel lips of that odious woman. But yet, how was she to tell it? It was not as though everything in this matter was quite pleasant between her and him. Lady Susanna had accused her of flirting with the man, and that she had told to him.

And in her heart of hearts she believed that the waltzing had been stopped because she had waltzed with Jack De Baron. Nothing could be more unjust, nothing more cruel; but still there were the facts. And then the sympathy between her and her husband was so imperfect. She was ever trying to be in love with him, but had never yet succeeded in telling even herself that she had succeeded.

CHAPTER VI.

“What matter if she does?”

ABOUT noon on the day after the occurrences related in the last chapter Lady George owned to herself that she was a most unfortunate young woman. Her husband had gone out, and she had not as yet told him anything of what that odious Augusta Mildmay had said to her. She had made various little attempts but had not known how to go on with them. She had begun by giving him her history of the Baroness, and he had scolded her for giving the woman a sovereign and for taking the woman about London in her carriage. It is very difficult to ask in a fitting way for the sympathies and co-operation of one who is scolding you. And Mary in this matter wanted almost more than sympathy and co-operation. Nothing short of the fullest manifestation of affectionate confidence would suffice to comfort her; and, desiring this, she had been afraid to mention Captain De Baron's name. She thought of the waltzing, thought of Susanna, and was cowardly. So the time slipped away from her, and when he left her on the following morning her story had not been told. He was no sooner gone than she felt that if it were to be told at all it should have been told at once.

Was it possible that that venomous girl should

really go to her husband with such a complaint? She knew well enough, or at any rate thought that she knew, that there had never been an engagement between the girl and Jack De Baron. She had heard it all over and over again from Adelaide Houghton, and had even herself been present at some joke on the subject between Adelaide and Jack. There was an idea that Jack was being pursued, and Mrs. Houghton had not scrupled to speak of it before him. Mary had not admired her friend's taste, and had on such occasions thought well of Jack because he had simply disowned any consciousness of such a state of things. But all this had made Mary sure that there was not and that there never had been any engagement; and yet the wretched woman, in her futile and frantic endeavours to force the man to marry her, was not ashamed to make so gross an attack as this!

If it hadn't been for Lady Susanna and those wretched fortune-telling cards, and that one last waltz, there would be nothing in it; but as it was, there might be so much! She had begun to fear that her husband's mind was suspicious—that he was prone to believe that things were going badly. Before her marriage, when she had in truth known him not at all, her father had given her some counsels in his light, airy way, which, however, had sunk deep into her mind, and which she had endeavoured to follow to the letter. He had said not a word to her as to her conduct to other men. It would not be natural that a father should do so. But he had told her how to behave to her husband. Men, he

had assured her, were to be won by such comforts as he described. A wife should provide that a man's dinner was such as he liked to eat, his bed such as he liked to lie on, his clothes arranged as he liked to wear them, and the household hours fixed to suit his convenience. She should learn and indulge his habits, should suit herself to him in external things of life, and could thus win from him a liking and a reverence which would wear better than the feeling generally called love, and would at last give the woman her proper influence. The Dean had meant to teach his child how she was to rule her husband, but of course had been too wise to speak of dominion. Mary, declaring to herself that the feeling generally called love should exist as well as the liking and the reverence, had laboured hard to win it all from her husband in accordance with her father's teaching; but it had seemed to her that her labour was wasted. Lord George did not in the least care what he ate. He evidently had no opinion at all about the bed; and as to his clothes, seemed to receive no accession of comfort by having one wife and her maid, instead of three sisters and their maid and old Mrs. Toff to look after them. He had no habits which she could indulge. She had looked about for the weak point in his armour, but had not found it. It seemed to her that she had no influence over him whatever. She was of course aware that they lived upon her fortune; but she was aware also that he knew that it was so, and that the consciousness made him unhappy. She could not, therefore, even endeavour to minister to his comfort by sur-

rounding him with pretty things. All expenditure was grievous to him. The only matter in which she had failed to give way to any expressed wish had been in that important matter of their town residence; and, as to that, she had in fact had no power of yielding. It had been of such moment as to have been settled for her by previous contract. But, she had often thought whether, in her endeavour to force herself to be in love with him, she would not persistently demand that Munster Court should be abandoned, and that all the pleasures of her own life should be sacrificed.

Now, for a day or two, she heartily wished that she had done so. She liked her house; she liked her brougham; she liked the gaieties of her life; and in a certain way she liked Jack De Baron; but they were all to her as nothing when compared to her duty and her sense of the obligations which she owed to her husband. Playful and childish as she was, all this was very serious to her; perhaps the more serious because she was playful and childish. She had not experience enough to know how small some things are, and how few are the evils which cannot be surmounted. It seemed to her that if Miss Mildmay were at this moment to bring the horrid charge against her, it might too probably lead to the crash of ruin and the horrors of despair. And yet, through it all, she had a proud feeling of her own innocence, and a consciousness that she would speak out very loudly should her husband hint to her that he believed the accusation.

Her father would now be in London in a day

or two, and on this occasion would again be staying in Munster Court. At last she made up her mind that she would tell everything to him. It was not, perhaps, the wisest resolution to which she could have come. A married woman should not usually teach herself to lean on her parents instead of her husband, and certainly not on her father. It is in this way that divided households are made. But she had no other real friend of whom she could ask a question. She liked Mrs. Houghton, but, as to such a matter as this, distrusted her altogether. She liked Miss Houghton, her friend's aunt, but did not know her well enough for such service as this. She had neither brother nor sister of her own, and her husband's brothers and sisters were certainly out of the question. Old Mrs. Montacute Jones had taken a great fancy to her, and she almost thought that she could have asked Mrs. Jones for advice; but she had no connection with Mrs. Jones, and did not dare to do it. Therefore she resolved to tell everything to her father.

On the evening before her father came to town there was another ball at Mrs. Montacute Jones's. This old lady, who had no one belonging to her but an invisible old husband, was the gayest of the gay among the gay people of London. On this occasion Mary was to have gone with Lady Brabazon, who was related to the Germains, and Lord George had arranged an escape for himself. They were to drive out together, and when she went to her ball he would go to bed. But in the course of the afternoon she told him that she was writing to Lady Brabazon to decline.

"Why won't you go?" said he.

"I don't care about it."

"If you mean that you won't go without me, of course I will go."

"It isn't that exactly. Of course it is nicer if you go; though I wouldn't take you if you don't like it. But——"

"But what, dear?"

"I think I'd rather not to-night. I don't know that I am quite strong enough." Then he didn't say another word to press her—only begging that she would not go to the dinner either if she were not well. But she was quite well, and she did go to the dinner.

Again she had meant to tell him why she would not go to Mrs. Jones's ball, but had been unable. Jack de Baron would be there, and would want to know why she would not waltz. And Adelaide Houghton would tease her about it, very likely before him. She had always waltzed with him, and could not now refuse without some reason. So she gave up her ball, sending word to say that she was not very well. "I shouldn't at all wonder if he has kept her at home because he's afraid of you," said Mrs. Houghton to her cousin.

Late in the following afternoon, before her husband had come home from his club, she told her father the whole story of her interview with Miss Mildmay. "What a tiger," he said, when he had heard it. "I have heard of women like that before, but I have never believed in them."

"You don't think she will tell him?"

"What matter if she does? What astonishes me most is that a woman should be so unwomanly as to fight for a man in such a way as that. It is the sort of thing that men used to do. 'You must give up your claim to that lady or else you must fight me.' Now she comes forward and says that she will fight you."

"But, papa, I have no claim."

"Nor probably has she?"

"No; I'm sure she has not. But what does that matter? The horrid thing is that she should say all this to me. I told her that she couldn't know that I was married."

"She merely wanted to make herself disagreeable. If one comes across disagreeable people one has to bear with it. I suppose she was jealous. She has seen you dancing or perhaps talking with the man."

"Oh yes."

"And in her anger she wanted to fly at someone."

"It is not her I care about, papa."

"What then?"

"If she were to tell George."

"What if she did? You do not mean to say that he would believe her? You do not think that he is jealous?"

She began to perceive that she could not get any available counsel from her father unless she could tell him everything. She must explain to him what evil Lady Susanna had already done; how her sister-in-law had acted as duenna, and had dared to ex-

press a suspicion about this very man. And she must tell him that Lord George had desired her not to waltz, and had done so, as she believed, because he had seen her waltzing with Jack de Baron. But all this seemed to her to be impossible. There was nothing which she would not be glad that he knew, if only he could be made to know it all truly. But she did not think that she could tell him what had really happened; and were she to do so, there would be horrid doubts on his mind. "You do not mean to say that he is given to that sort of thing?" asked the Dean, again with a look of anger.

"Oh no; at least I hope not. Susanna did try to make mischief."

"The d—— she did," said the Dean. Mary almost jumped in her chair, she was so much startled by such a word from her father's mouth. "If he's fool enough to listen to that old cat, he'll make himself a miserable and a contemptible man. Did she say anything to him about this very man?"

"She said something very unpleasant to me, and of course I told George."

"Well?"

"He was all that was kind. He declared that he had no objection to make to Captain De Baron at all. I am sure there was no reason why he should."

"Tush!" exclaimed the Dean, as though any assurance or even any notice of the matter in that direction were quite unnecessary. "And there was an end of that?"

"I think he is a little inclined to be—to be——"

"To be what? You had better tell it all out, Mary."

"Perhaps what you would call strict. He told me not to waltz any more the other day."

"He's a fool," said the Dean, angrily.

"Oh no, papa; don't say that. Of course he has a right to think as he likes, and of course I am bound to do as he says."

"He has no experience—no knowledge of the world. Perhaps one of the last things which a man learns is to understand innocence when he sees it." The word innocence was so pleasant to her that she put out her hand and touched his knee. "Take no notice of what that angry woman said to you. Above all, do not drop your acquaintance with this gentleman. You should be too proud to be influenced in any way by such scandal."

"But if she were to speak to George?"

"She will hardly dare. But if she does, that is no affair of yours. You can have nothing to do with it till he shall speak to you."

"You would not tell him?"

"No; I should not even think about it. She is below your notice. If it should be the case that she dares to speak to him, and that he should be weak enough to be moved by what such a creature can say to him, you will, I am sure, have dignity enough to hold your own with him. Tell him that you think too much of his honour, as well of your own, to make it necessary for him to trouble himself. But he will know that himself, and if he does speak to you, he will only speak in pity for her."

All this he said slowly and seriously, looking as she had sometimes seen him look when preaching in the cathedral. And she believed him now as she always believed him then, and was in a great measure comforted.

But she could not but be surprised that her father should so absolutely refuse to entertain the idea that any intimacy between herself and Captain De Baron should be injurious. It gratified her that it should be so, but nevertheless she was surprised. She had endeavoured to examine the question by her own lights, but had failed in answering it. She knew well enough that she liked the man. She had discovered in him the realisation of those early dreams. His society was in every respect pleasant to her. He was full of playfulness, and yet always gentle. He was not very clever, but clever enough. She had made the mistake in life—or rather others had made it for her—of taking herself too soon from her playthings, and devoting herself to the stern reality of a husband. She understood something of this, and liked to think that she might amuse herself innocently with such a one as Jack De Baron. She was sure that she did not love him—that there was no danger of her loving him; and she was quite confident also that he did not love her. But yet—yet there had been a doubt on her mind. Innocent as it all was, there might be cause of offence to her husband. It was this thought that had made her sometimes long to be taken away from London and be immured amidst the dulness of Cross Hall. But of such dangers and of such

fears her father saw nothing. Her father simply bade her to maintain her own dignity and have her own way. Perhaps her father was right.

On the next day the Dean and his son-in-law went, according to appointment, to Mr. Battle. Mr. Battle received them with his usual bland courtesy, and listened attentively to whatever the two gentlemen had to say. Lawyers who know their business always allow their clients to run out their stories even when knowing that the words so spoken are wasted words. It is the quickest way of arriving at their desired result. Lord George had a good deal to say, because his mind was full of the conviction that he would not for worlds put an obstacle in the way of his brother's heir, if he could be made sure that the child was the heir. He wished for such certainty, and cursed the heavy chance that had laid so grievous a duty on his shoulders.

When he had done, Mr. Battle began. "I think, Lord George, that I have learned most of the particulars."

Lord George started back in his chair. "What particulars?" said the Dean.

"The Marchioness's late husband—for she doubtless is his lordship's wife—was a lunatic."

"A lunatic!" said Lord George.

"We do not quite know when he died, but we believe it was about a month or two before the date at which his Lordship wrote home to say that he was about to be married."

"Then that child cannot be Lord Popenjoy," said the Dean with exultation.

"That's going a little too fast, Mr. Dean. There may have been a divorce."

"There is no such thing in Roman Catholic countries," said the Dean. "Certainly not in Italy."

"I do not quite know," said the lawyer. "Of course we are as yet very much in the dark. I should not wonder if we found that there had been two marriages. All this is what we have got to find out. The lady certainly lived in great intimacy with your brother before her first husband died."

"How do you know anything about it?" asked Lord George.

"I happened to have heard the name of the Marchese Luigi, and I knew where to apply for information."

"We did not mean that any inquiry should be made so suddenly," said Lord George angrily.

"It was for the best," said the Dean.

"Certainly for the best," said the unruffled lawyer. "I would now recommend that I may be commissioned to send out my own confidential clerk to learn all the circumstances of the case; and that I should inform Mr. Stokes that I am going to do so, on your instructions, Lord George." Lord George shivered. "I think we should even offer to give his lordship time to send an agent with my clerk if he pleases to do so, or to send one separately at the same time, or to take any other step that he may please. It is clearly your duty, my lord, to have the inquiry made."

"Your manifest duty," said the Dean, unable to restrain his triumph.

Lord George pleaded for delay, and before he left the lawyer's chambers almost quarrelled with his father-in-law; but before he did leave them he had given the necessary instructions.

CHAPTER VII.

Mr. Houghton wants a Glass of Sherry.

LORD GEORGE, when he got out of the lawyer's office with his father-in-law, expressed himself as being very angry at what had been done. While discussing the matter within, in the presence of Mr. Battle, he had been unable to withstand the united energies of the Dean and the lawyer, but, nevertheless, even while he had yielded, he had felt that he was being driven.

"I don't think he was at all justified in making any inquiry," he said, as soon as he found himself in the square.

"My dear George," replied the Dean, "the quicker this can be done the better."

"An agent should only act in accordance with his instructions."

"Without disputing that, my dear fellow, I cannot but say that I am glad to have learned so much."

"And I am very sorry."

"We both mean the same thing, George."

"I don't think we do," said Lord George, who was determined to be angry.

"You are sorry that it should be so—and so am I." The triumph which had sat in the Dean's eye when he heard the news in the lawyer's chambers

almost belied this latter assertion. "But I certainly am glad to be on the track as soon as possible, if there is a track which it is our duty to follow."

"I didn't like that man at all," said Lord George.

"I neither like him nor dislike him; but I believe him to be honest, and I know him to be clever. He will find out the truth for us."

"And when it turns out that Brotherton was legally married to the woman, what will the world think of me then?"

"The world will think that you have done your duty. There can be no question about it, George. Whether it be agreeable or disagreeable, it must be done. Could you have brought yourself to have thrown the burden of doing this upon your own child, perhaps some five-and-twenty years hence, when it may be done so much easier now by yourself."

"I have no child," said Lord George.

"But you will have." The Dean, as he said this, could not keep himself from looking too closely into his son-in-law's face. He was most anxious for the birth of that grandson who was to be made a marquis by his own energies.

"God knows. Who can say?"

"At any rate, there is that child at Manor Cross. If he be not the legitimate heir, is it not better for him that the matter should be settled now than when he may have lived twenty years in expectation of the title and property?" The Dean said much more

than this, urging the propriety of what had been done, but he did not succeed in quieting Lord George's mind.

That same day the Dean told the whole story to his daughter, perhaps in his eagerness adding something to what he had heard from the lawyer. "Divorces in Roman Catholic countries," he said, "are quite impossible. I believe they are never granted, except for State purposes. There may be some new civil law, but I don't think it; and then, if the man was an acknowledged lunatic, it must have been impossible."

"But how could the Marquis be so foolish, papa?"

"Ah, that is what we do not understand. But it will come out. You may be sure it will all come out. Why did he come home to England and bring them with him? And why just at this time? Why did he not communicate his first marriage? and if not that, why the second? He probably did not intend at first to put his child forward as Lord Popenjoy, but has become subsequently bold. The woman, perhaps, has gradually learned the facts, and insisted on making the claim for her child. She may gradually have become stronger than he. He may have thought that by coming here and declaring the boy to be his heir, he would put down suspicion by the very boldness of his assertion. Who can say? But these are the facts, and they are sufficient to justify us in demanding that everything shall be brought to light." Then for the first time he asked her what immediate hope there was that Lord George might

have an heir. She tried to laugh, then blushed; then wept a tear or two, and muttered something which he failed to hear. "There is time enough for all that, Mary," he said, with his pleasantest smile, and then left her.

Lord George did not return home till late in the afternoon. He went first to Mrs. Houghton's house, and told her nearly everything. But he told it in such a way as to make her understand that his strongest feeling at the present moment was one of anger against the Dean.

"Of course, George," she said, for she always called him George now, "the Dean will try to have it all his own way."

"I am almost sorry that I ever mentioned my brother's name to him."

"She, I suppose, is ambitious," said Mrs. Houghton. "She" was intended to signify Mary.

"No. To do Mary justice, it is not her fault. I don't think she cares for it."

"I daresay she would like to be a Marchioness as well as anyone else. I know I should."

"You might have been," he said, looking tenderly into her face.

"I wonder how I should have borne all this? You say that she is indifferent. I should have been so anxious on your behalf—to see you installed in you rights!"

"I have no rights. There is my brother."

"Yes; but as the heir. She has none of the feeling about you that I have, George." Then she put out her hand to him, which he took and held.

"I begin to think that I was wrong. I begin to know that I was wrong. We could have lived, at any rate."

"It is too late," he said, still holding her hand.

"Yes; it is too late. I wonder whether you will ever understand the sort of struggle which I had to go through, and the feeling of duty which overcame me at last? Where should we have lived?"

"At Cross Hall, I suppose."

"And if there had been children, how should we have brought them up?" She did not blush as she asked the question, but he did. "And yet I wish that I had been braver. I think I should have suited you better than she."

"She is as good as gold," he said, moved by a certain loyalty which, though it was not sufficient absolutely to protect her from wrong, was too strong to endure to hear her reproached.

"Do not tell me of her goodness," said Mrs. Houghton, jumping up from her seat. "I do not want to hear of her goodness. Tell me of my goodness. Does she love you as I do? Does she make you the hero of her thoughts? She has no idea of any hero. She would think more of Jack De Baron whirling round the room with her than of your position in the world, or of his, or even of her own." He winced visibly when he heard Jack De Baron's name. "You need not be afraid," she continued; "for though she is, as you say, as good as gold, she knows nothing about love. She took you when you came because it suited the ambition of the Dean—

as she would have taken anything else that he provided for her."

"I believe she loves me," he said, having in his heart of hearts, at the moment, much more solicitude in regard to his absent wife than to the woman who was close to his feet and was flattering him to the top of his bent.

"And her love, such as it is, is sufficient for you?"

"She is my wife."

"Yes; because I allowed it; because I thought it wrong to subject your future life to the poverty which I should have brought with me. Do you think there was no sacrifice then?"

"But, Adelaide; it is so."

"Yes, it is so. But what does it all mean? The time is gone by when men, or women either, were too qualmish and too queasy to admit the truth even to themselves. Of course you are married, and so am I; but marriage does not alter the heart. I did not cease to love you because I would not marry you. You could not cease to love me merely because I refused you. When I acknowledged to myself that Mr. Houghton's income was necessary to me, I did not become enamoured of him. Nor, I suppose, did you when you found the same as to Miss Lovelace's money."

Upon this he also jumped up from his seat, and stood before her. "I will not have even you say that I married my wife for her money."

"How was it, then, George? I am not blaming you for doing what I did as well as you."

"I should blame myself. I should feel myself to be degraded."

"Why so? It seems to me that I am bolder than you. I can look the cruelties of the world in the face, and declare openly how I will meet them. I did marry Mr. Houghton for his money, and of course he knew it. Is it to be supposed that he or any human being could have thought that I married him for love? I make his house comfortable for him as far as I can, and am civil to his friends, and look my best at his table. I hope he is satisfied with his bargain; but I cannot do more. I cannot wear him in my heart. Nor, George, do I believe that you in your heart can ever wear Mary Lovelace!" But he did—only that he thought that he had space there for two, and that in giving habitation to this second love he was adding at any rate to the excitements of his life. "Tell me, George," said the woman, laying her hand upon his breast, "is it she or I that have a home there?"

"I will not say that I do not love my wife," he said.

"No; you are afraid. The formalities of the world are so much more to you than to me! Sit down, George. Oh George!" Then she was on her knees at his feet, hiding her face upon her hands, while his arms were almost necessarily thrown over her and embracing her. The lady was convulsed with sobs, and he was thinking how it would be with him and her should the door be opened and some pair of eyes see them as they were. But her ears were sharp in spite of her sobs. There was the

fall of a foot on the stairs which she heard long before it reached him, and, in a moment, she was in her chair. He looked at her, and there was no trace of a tear. "It's Houghton," she said, putting her finger up to her mouth with almost a comic gesture. There was a smile in her eyes, and a little mockery of fear in the trembling of her hand and the motion of her lips. To him it seemed to be tragic enough. He had to assume to this gentleman whom he had been injuring a cordial, friendly manner—and thus to lie to him. He had to make pretences, and at a moment's notice to feign himself something very different from what he was. Had the man come a little more quickly, had the husband caught him with the wife at his knees, nothing could have saved him and his own wife from utter misery. So he felt it to be, and the feeling almost overwhelmed him. His heart palpitated with emotion as the wronged husband's hand was on the door. She, the while, was as thoroughly composed as a stage heroine. But she had flattered him and pretended to love him, and it did not occur to him that he ought to be angry with her. "Who would ever think of seeing you at this time of day?" said Mrs. Houghton.

"Well, no; I'm going back to the club in a few minutes. I had to come up to Piccadilly to have my hair cut!"

"Your hair cut!"

"Honour bright! Nothing upsets me so much as having my hair cut. I'm going to ring for a glass of sherry. By-the-bye, Lord George, a good

many of them are talking at the club about young Popenjoy."

"What are they saying?" Lord George felt that he must open his mouth, but did not wish to talk to this man, and especially did not wish to talk about his own affairs.

"Of course I know nothing about it; but surely the way Brotherton has come back is very odd. I used to be very fond of your brother, you know. There was nobody her father used to swear by so much as him. But, by George, I don't know what to make of it now. Nobody has seen the Marchioness."

"I have not seen her," said Lord George; "but she is there all the same for that."

"Nobody doubts that she's there. She's there, safe enough. And the boy is there, too. We're all quite sure of that. But you know the Marquis of Brotherton is somebody."

"I hope so," said Lord George.

"And when he brings his wife home people will expect—will expect to know something about it—eh?" All this was said with an intention of taking Lord George's part in a question which was already becoming one of interest to the public. It was hinted here and there that there was a "screw loose" about this young Popenjoy, who had just been brought from Italy, and that Lord George would have to look to it. Of course they who were connected with Brothershire were more prone to talk of it than others, and Mr. Houghton, who had heard and said a good deal about it, thought that he was only being civil

to Lord George in seeming to take part against the Marquis.

But Lord George felt it to be matter of offence that any outsider should venture to talk about his family. "If people would only confine themselves to subjects with which they are acquainted, it would be very much better," he said; and then almost immediately took his leave.

"That's all regular nonsense, you know," Mr. Houghton said, as soon as he was alone with his wife. "Of course people are talking about it. Your father says that Brotherton must be mad."

"That's no reason why you should come and tell Lord George what people say. You never have any tact."

"Of course I'm wrong; I always am," said the husband, swallowing his glass of sherry and then taking his departure.

Lord George was now in a very uneasy state of mind. He intended to be cautious—had intended even to be virtuous and self-denying; and yet, in spite of his intentions, he had fallen into such a condition of things with Mr. Houghton's wife, that were the truth to be known, he would be open to most injurious proceedings. To him the love affair with another man's wife was more embarrassing even than pleasant. Its charm did not suffice to lighten for him the burden of the wickedness. He had certain inklings of complaint in his own mind against his own wife, but he felt that his own hands should be perfectly clean before he could deal with those inklings magisterially and maritally. How would he

look were she to turn upon him and ask him as to his own conduct with Adelaide Houghton? And then, into what a sea of trouble had he not already fallen in this matter of his brother's marriage? His first immediate duty was that of writing to his elder sister, and he expressed himself to her in strong language. After telling her all that he had heard from the lawyer, he spoke of himself and of the Dean. "It will make me very unhappy," he wrote. "Do you remember what Hamlet says?"

Oh cursed spite,
That ever I was born to set it right.

I feel like that altogether. I want to get nothing by it. No man ever less begrudging to his elder brother than I do all that belongs to him. Though he has himself treated me badly, I would support him in anything for the sake of the family. At this moment I most heartily wish that the child may be Lord Popenjoy. The matter will destroy all my happiness perhaps for the next ten years—perhaps for ever. And I cannot but think that the Dean has interfered in a most unjustifiable manner. He drives me on, so that I almost feel that I shall be forced to quarrel with him. With him it is manifestly personal ambition, and not duty." There was much more of it in the same strain, but at the same time an acknowledgment that he had now instructed the Dean's lawyer to make the inquiry.

Lady Sarah's answer was perhaps more judicious; and as it was shorter it shall be given entire.

"Cross Hall, May 10, 187—.

"MY DEAR GEORGE,—Of course it is a sad thing to us all that this terrible inquiry should be forced upon us; and more grievous to you than to us, as you must take the active part in it. But this is a manifest duty, and duties are seldom altogether pleasant. All that you say as to yourself—which I know to be absolutely true—must at any rate make your conscience clear in the matter. It is not for your sake nor for our sake that this is to be done, but for the sake of the family at large, and to prevent the necessity of future lawsuits which would be ruinous to the property. If the child be legitimate, let that, in God's name, be proclaimed so loud that no one shall hereafter be able to cast a doubt upon the fact. To us it must be matter of deepest sorrow that our brother's child and the future head of our family should have been born under circumstances which, at the best, must still be disgraceful. But, although that is so, it will be equally our duty to acknowledge his rights to the full, if they be his rights. Though the son of the widow of a lunatic foreigner, still if the law says that he is Brotherton's heir, it is for us to render the difficulties in his way as light as possible. But that we may do so, we must know what he is.

"Of course you find the Dean to be pushing and perhaps a little vulgar. No doubt with him the chief feeling is one of personal ambition. But in his way he is wise, and I do not know that in this matter he has done anything which had better have been

left undone. He believes that the child is not legitimate; and so in my heart do I.

"You must remember that my dear mother is altogether on Brotherton's side. The feeling that there should be an heir is so much to her, and the certainty that the boy is at any rate her grandson, that she cannot endure that a doubt should be expressed. Of course this does not tend to make our life pleasant down here. Poor dear mamma! Of course we do all we can to comfort her.

"Your affectionate sister,

"SARAH GERMAIN."

CHAPTER VIII.

The Dean is very Busy.

A WEEK had passed away and nothing had as yet been heard from the Marquis, nor had Mr. Battle's confidential clerk as yet taken his departure for Italy, when Mrs. Montacute Jones called one day in Munster Court. Lady George had not seen her new old friend since the night of the ball to which she had not gone, but had received more than one note respecting her absence on that occasion and various other little matters. Why did not Lady George come and lunch; and why did not Lady George come and drive? Lady George was a little afraid that there was a conspiracy about her in reference to Captain De Baron, and that Mrs. Montacute Jones was one of the conspirators. If so, Adelaide Houghton was certainly another. It had been very pleasant. When she examined herself about this man, as she endeavoured to do, she declared that it had been as innocent as pleasant. She did not really believe that either Adelaide Houghton or Mrs. Montacute Jones had intended to do mischief. Mischief, such as the alienation of her own affections from her husband, she regarded as quite out of the question. She would not even admit to herself that it was possible that she should fall into such a pit as that. But there were other dangers; and those friends of hers

would indeed be dangerous if they brought her into any society that made her husband jealous. Therefore, though she liked Mrs. Montacute Jones very much, she had avoided the old lady lately, knowing that something would be said about Jack De Baron, and not quite confident as to her own answers.

And now Mrs. Montacute Jones had come to her. "My dear Lady George," she said, "where on earth have you been? Are you going to cut me? If so, tell me at once."

"Oh Mrs. Jones," said Lady George, kissing her, "how can you ask such a question?"

"Because, you know, it requires two to play at that game, and I'm not going to be cut." Mrs. Montacute Jones was a stout-built but very short old lady, with gray hair curled in precise rolls down her face, with streaky cheeks, giving her a look of extreme good health, and very bright gray eyes. She was always admirably dressed, so well dressed that her enemies accused her of spending enormous sums on her toilet. She was very old—some people said eighty, adding probably not more than ten years to her age—very enthusiastic, particularly in reference to her friends; very fond of gaiety, and very charitable. "Why didn't you come to my ball?"

"Lord George doesn't care about balls," said Mary, laughing.

"Come, come! Don't try and humbug me. It had been all arranged that you should come when he went to bed. Hadn't it now?"

"Something had been said about it."

"A good deal had been said about it, and he

had agreed. Are you going to tell me that he won't go out with you, and yet dislikes your going out without him? Is he such a Bluebeard as that?"

"He's not a Bluebeard at all, Mrs. Jones."

"I hope not. There has been something about that German Baroness—hasn't there?"

"Oh dear no."

"I heard that there was. She came and took you and the brougham all about London. And there was a row with Lady Selina. I heard of it."

"But that had nothing to do with my going to your party."

"Well, no; why should it? She's a nasty woman, that Baroness Banmann. If we can't get on here in England without German baronesses and American she-doctors, we are in a bad way. You shouldn't have let them drag you into that lot. Women's Rights! Women are quite able to hold their own without such trash as that. I'm told she's in debt everywhere, and can't pay a shilling. I hope they'll lock her up."

"She is nothing to me, Mrs. Jones."

"I hope not. What was it then? I know there was something. He doesn't object to Captain De Baron; does he?"

"Object to him! Why should he object to Captain De Baron?"

"I don't know why. Men do take such fancies into their heads. You are not going to give up dancing—are you?"

"Not altogether. I'm not sure that I care for it very much."

"Oh Lady George! where do you expect to go to?" Mary could not keep herself from laughing, though she was at the same time almost inclined to be angry with the old lady's interference. "I should have said that I didn't know a young person in the world fonder of dancing than you are. Perhaps he objects to it."

"He doesn't like my waltzing," said Mary, with a blush. On former occasions she had almost made up her mind to confide her troubles to this old woman, and now the occasion seemed so suitable that she could not keep herself from telling so much as that.

"Oh!" said Mrs. Montacute Jones. "That's it! I knew there was something. My dear, he's a goose, and you ought to tell him so."

"Couldn't you tell him?" said Mary, laughing.

"I would do it in half a minute, and think nothing of it!"

"Pray don't. He wouldn't like it at all."

"My dear, you shouldn't be afraid of him. I'm not going to preach up rebellion against husbands. I'm the last woman in London to do that. I know the comfort of a quiet house as well as anyone, and that two people can't get along easy together unless there is a good deal of give and take. But it doesn't do to give up everything. What does he say about it?"

"He says he doesn't like it."

"What would he say if you told him you didn't like his going to his club?"

"He wouldn't go."

"Nonsense! It's being a dog in the manger, because he doesn't care for it himself. I should have it out with him—nicely and pleasantly. Just tell him that you're fond of it, and ask him to change his mind. I can't bear anybody interfering to put down the innocent pleasures of young people. A man like that just opens his mouth and speaks a word, and takes away the whole pleasure of a young woman's season! You've got my card for the 10th of June?"

"Oh yes—I've got it."

"And I shall expect you to come. It's only going to be a small affair. Get him to bring you if you can, and you do as I bid you. Just have it out with him—nicely and quietly. Nobody hates a row so much as I do, but people oughtn't to be trampled on."

All this had considerable effect upon Lady George. She quite agreed with Mrs. Jones that people ought not to be trampled on. Her father had never trampled on her. From him there had been very little positive ordering as to what she might and what she might not do. And yet she had been only a child when living with her father. Now she was a married woman, and the mistress of her own house. She was quite sure that were she to ask her father, the Dean would say that such a prohibition as this was absurd. Of course she could not ask her father. She would not appeal from her husband to him. But it was a hardship, and she almost made up her mind that she would request him to revoke the order.

Then she was very much troubled by a long letter from the Baroness Banmann. The Baroness was going to bring an action jointly against Lady Selina Protest and Miss Mildmay, whom the reader will know as Aunt Ju; and informed Lady George that she was to be summoned as a witness. This was for awhile a grievous affliction to her. "I know nothing about it," she said to her husband; "I only just went there once because Miss Mildmay asked me."

"It was a very foolish thing for her to do."

"And I was foolish, perhaps; but what can I say about it? I don't know anything."

"You shouldn't have bought those other tickets."

"How could I refuse when the woman asked for such a trifle?"

"Then you took her to Miss Mildmay's."

"She would get into the brougham, and I couldn't get rid of her. Hadn't I better write and tell her that I know nothing about it?" But to this Lord George objected, requesting her altogether to hold her peace on the subject, and never even to speak about it to anyone. He was not good-humoured with her, and this was clearly no occasion for asking him about the waltzing. Indeed, just at present he rarely was in a good humour, being much troubled in his mind on the great Popenjoy question.

At this time the Dean was constantly up in town, running backwards and forwards between London and Brotherton, prosecuting his inquiry, and spending a good deal of his time at Mr. Battle's offices. In doing all this he by no means acted in

perfect concert with Lord George, nor did he often stay or even dine at the house in Munster Court. There had been no quarrel, but he found that Lord George was not cordial with him, and therefore placed himself at the hotel in Suffolk Street. "Why doesn't papa come here, as he is in town?" Mary said to her husband.

"I don't know why he comes to town at all," replied her husband.

"I suppose he comes because he has business, or because he likes it. I shouldn't think of asking why he comes; but as he is here, I wish he wouldn't stay at a nasty dull hotel, after all that was arranged."

"You may be sure he knows what he likes best," said Lord George, sulkily. That allusion to "an arrangement" had not served to put him in a good humour.

Mary had known well why her father was so much in London, and had in truth known also why he did not come to Munster Court. She could perceive that her father and husband were drifting into unfriendly relations, and greatly regretted it. In her heart she took her father's part. She was not as keen as he was in this matter of the little Popenjoy, being restrained by a feeling that it would not become her to be over anxious for her own elevation or for the fall of others; but she had always sympathised with her father in everything, and therefore she sympathised with him in this. And then there was gradually growing upon her a conviction that her father was the stronger man of the two, the

more reasonable, and certainly the kinder. She had thoroughly understood when the house was furnished, very much at the Dean's expense, that he was to be a joint occupant in it when it might suit him to be in London. He himself had thought less about this, having rather submitted to the suggestion as an excuse for his own liberality than contemplated any such final arrangement. But Lord George remembered it. The house would certainly be open to him should he choose to come; but Lord George would not press it.

Mr. Stokes had thought it proper to go in person to Manor Cross, in order that he might receive instructions from the Marquis.

“Upon my word, Mr. Stokes,” said the Marquis, “only that I would not seem to be uncourteous to you, I should feel disposed to say that this interview can do no good.”

“It is a very serious matter, my lord.”

“It is a very serious annoyance, certainly, that my own brothers and sisters should turn against me, and give me all this trouble because I have chosen to marry a foreigner. It is simply an instance of that pigheaded English blindness which makes us think that everything outside our own country is or ought to be given up to the devil. My sisters are very religious, and, I daresay, very good women. But they are quite willing to think that I and my wife ought to be damned because we talk Italian, and that my son ought to be disinherited because he was not baptised in an English church. They have got this stupid story into their heads, and they

must do as they please about it. I will have no hand in it. I will take care that there shall be no difficulty in my son's way when I die."

"That will be right, of course, my lord."

"I know where all this comes from. My brother, who is an idiot, has married the daughter of a vulgar clergyman, who thinks in his ignorance that he can make his grandson, if he has one, an English nobleman. He'll spend his money and he'll burn his fingers, and I don't care how much money he spends or how much he burns his hands. I don't suppose his purse is so very long but that he may come to the bottom of it."

This was nearly all that passed between Mr. Stokes and the Marquis. Mr. Stokes then went back to town and gave Mr. Battle to understand that nothing was to be done on their side.

The Dean was very anxious that the confidential clerk should be despatched, and at one time almost thought that he would go himself.

"Better not, Mr. Dean. Everybody would know," said Mr. Battle.

"And I should intend everybody to know," said the Dean. "Do you suppose that I am doing anything that I'm ashamed of?"

"But being a dignitary——" began Mr. Battle.

"What has that to do with it? A dignitary, as you call it, is not to see a child robbed of her rights. I only want to find the truth, and I should never take shame to myself in looking for that by honest means."

But Mr. Battle prevailed, persuading the Dean that the confidential clerk, even though he confined himself to honest means, would reach his point more certainly than a dean of the Church of England.

But still there was delay. Mr. Stokes did not take his journey down to Brotherton quite as quickly as he perhaps might have done, and then there was a prolonged correspondence carried on through an English lawyer settled at Leghorn. But at last the man was sent.

"I think we know this," said Mr. Battle to the Dean, on the day before the man started, "there were certainly two marriages. One of them took place as much as five years ago, and the other after his lordship had written to his brother."

"Then the first marriage must have been nothing," said the Dean.

"It does not follow. It may have been a legal marriage, although the parties chose to confirm it by a second ceremony."

"But when did the man Luigi die?"

"And where and how? This is what we have got to find out. I shouldn't wonder if we found that he had been for years a lunatic."

Almost all this the Dean communicated to Lord George, being determined that his son-in-law should be seen to act in co-operation with him. They met occasionally in Mr. Battle's chambers, and sometimes by appointment in Munster Court.

"It is essentially necessary that you should know what is being done," said the Dean to his son-in-law.

Lord George fretted and fumed, and expressed an opinion that as the matter had been put into a lawyer's hands it had better be left there. But the Dean had very much his own way.

CHAPTER IX.

The Marquis migrates to London.

SOON after Mr. Stokes's visit there was a great disturbance at Manor Cross, whether caused or not by that event no one was able to say. The Marquis and all the family were about to proceed to London. The news first reached Cross Hall through Mrs. Toff, who still kept up friendly relations with a portion of the English establishment at the great house. There probably was no idea of maintaining a secret on the subject. The Marquis and his wife, with Lord Popenjoy and the servants, could not have had themselves carried up to town without the knowledge of all Brotherton, nor was there any adequate reason for supposing that secrecy was desired. Nevertheless Mrs. Toff made a great deal of the matter, and the ladies at Cross Hall were not without a certain perturbed interest as though in a mystery. It was first told to Lady Sarah, for Mrs. Toff was quite aware of the position of things, and knew that the old Marchioness herself was not to be regarded as being on their side.

“Yes, my lady, it's quite true,” said Mrs. Toff. “The horses is ordered for next Friday.” This was said on the previous Saturday, so that considerable time was allowed for the elucidation of the mystery. “And the things is already being packed, and her

ladyship—that is if she is her ladyship—is taking every dress and every rag as she brought with her."

"Where are they going to, Toff? Not to the square?" Now the Marquis of Brotherton had an old family house in Cavendish Square, which, however, had been shut up for the last ten or fifteen years, but was still known as the family house by all the adherents of the family.

"No, my lady. I did hear from one of the servants that they are going to Scumberg's Hotel, in Albemarle Street."

Then Lady Sarah told the news to her mother. The poor old lady felt that she was ill-used. She had been at any rate true to her eldest son, had always taken his part during his absence by scolding her daughters whenever an allusion was made to the family at Manor Cross, and had almost worshipped him when he would come to her on Sunday. And now he was going off to London without saying a word of the journey. "I don't believe that Toff knows anything about it," she said. "Toff is a nasty, meddling creature, and I wish she had not come here at all." The management of the Marchioness under these circumstances was very difficult, but Lady Sarah was a woman who allowed no difficulty to crush her. She did not expect the world to be very easy. She went on with her constant needle, trying to comfort her mother as she worked. At this time the Marchioness had almost brought herself to quarrel with her younger son, and would say very hard things about him and about the Dean.

She had more than once said that Mary was a "nasty sly thing," and had expressed herself as greatly aggrieved by that marriage. All this came of course from the Marquis, and was known by her daughters to come from the Marquis; and yet the Marchioness had never as yet been allowed to see either her daughter-in-law or Popenjoy.

On the following day her son came to her when the three sisters were at church in the afternoon. On these occasions he would stay for a quarter of an hour, and would occupy the greater part of the time in abusing the Dean and Lord George. But on this day she could not refrain from asking him a question. "Are you going up to London, Brotherton?"

"What makes you ask?"

"Because they tell me so. Sarah says that the servants are talking about it."

"I wish Sarah had something to do better than listening to the servants."

"But you are going?"

"If you want to know, I believe we shall go up to town for a few days. Popenjoy ought to see a dentist, and I want to do a few things. Why the deuce shouldn't I go up to London as well as anyone else?"

"Of course, if you wish it."

"To tell you the truth, I don't much wish anything, except to get out of this cursed country again."

"Don't say that, Brotherton. You are an Englishman."

"I am ashamed to say I am. I wish with all my heart that I had been born a Chinese or a Red Indian." This he said, not in furtherance of any peculiar cosmopolitan proclivities, but because the saying of it would vex his mother. "What am I to think of the country, when the moment I get here I am hounded by all my own family because I choose to live after my own fashion and not after theirs?"

"I haven't hounded you."

"No. You might possibly get more by being on good terms with me than bad. And so might they if they knew it. I'll be even with Master George before I've done with him; and I'll be even with that parson, too, who still smells of the stables. I'll lead him a dance that will about ruin him. And as for his daughter——"

"It wasn't I got up the marriage, Brotherton."

"I don't care who got it up. But I can have inquiries made as well as another person. I am not very fond of spies; but if other people use spies, so can I too. That young woman is no better than she ought to be. The Dean, I daresay, knows it; but he shall know that I know it. And Master George shall know what I think about it. As there is to be war, he shall know what it is to have war. She has got a lover of her own already, and everybody who knows them is talking about it."

"Oh Brotherton!"

"And she is going in for women's rights! George has made a nice thing of it for himself. He has to live on the Dean's money, so that he doesn't dare to call his soul his own. And yet he's

fool enough to send a lawyer to me to tell me that my wife is a ——, and my son a ——!" He made use of very plain language, so that the poor old woman was horrified and aghast and dumbfounded. And as he spoke the words there was a rage in his eyes worse than anything she had seen before. He was standing with his back to the fire, which was burning though the weather was warm, and the tails of his coat were hanging over his arms as he kept his hands in his pockets. He was generally quiescent in his moods, and apt to express his anger in sarcasm rather than in outspoken language; but now he was so much moved that he was unable not to give vent to his feelings. As the Marchioness looked at him, shaking with fear, there came into her distracted mind some vague idea of Cain and Abel, though had she collected her thoughts she would have been far from telling herself that her eldest son was Cain. "He thinks," continued the Marquis, "that because I have lived abroad I sha'n't mind that sort of thing. I wonder how he'll feel when I tell him the truth about his wife—I mean to do it—and what the Dean will think when I use a little plain language about his daughter? I mean to do that too. I shan't mince matters. I suppose you have heard of Captain de Baron, mother?"

Now the Marchioness unfortunately had heard of Captain De Baron. Lady Susanna had brought the tidings down to Cross Hall. Had Lady Susanna really believed that her sister-in-law was wickedly entertaining a lover, there would have been some reticence in her mode of alluding to so dreadful a

subject. The secret would have been confided to Lady Sarah in awful conclave, and some solemn warning would have been conveyed to Lord George, with a prayer that he would lose no time in withdrawing the unfortunate young woman from evil influences. But Lady Susanna had entertained no such fear. Mary was young, and foolish, and fond of pleasure. Hard as was this woman in her manner, and disagreeable as she made herself, yet she could, after a fashion, sympathise with the young wife. She had spoken of Captain De Baron with disapprobation certainly, but had not spoken of him as a fatal danger. And she had also spoken of the Baroness Banmann and Mary's folly in going to the Institute. The old Marchioness had heard of these things, and now, when she heard further of them from her son, she almost believed all that he told her. "Don't be hard upon poor George," she said.

"I give as I get, mother. I'm not one of those who return good for evil. Had he left me alone, I should have left him alone. As it is, I rather think I shall be hard upon poor George. Do you suppose that all Brotherton hasn't heard already what they are doing—that there is a man or a woman in the county who doesn't know that my own brother is questioning the legitimacy of my own son? And then you ask me not to be hard."

"It isn't my doing, Brotherton."

"But those three girls have their hand in it. That's what they call charity! That's what they go to church for!"

All this made the poor old Marchioness very ill.

Before her son left her she was almost prostrate; and yet, to the end, he did not spare her. But as he left he said one word which apparently was intended to comfort her. "Perhaps Popenjoy had better be brought here for you to see before he is taken up to town." There had been a promise made before that the child should be brought to the Hall to bless his grandmother. On this occasion she had been too much horrified and overcome by what had been said to urge her request; but when the proposition was renewed by him of course she assented.

Popenjoy's visit to Cross Hall was arranged with a good deal of state, and was made on the following Tuesday. On the Monday there came a message to say that the child should be brought up at twelve on the following day. The Marquis was not coming himself, and the child would of course be inspected by all the ladies. At noon they were assembled in the drawing-room; but they were kept there waiting for half an hour, during which the Marchioness repeatedly expressed her conviction that now, at the last moment, she was to be robbed of the one great desire of her heart. "He won't let him come because he's so angry with George," she said, sobbing.

"He wouldn't have sent a message yesterday, mother," said Lady Amelia, "if he hadn't meant to send him."

"You are all so very unkind to him," ejaculated the Marchioness.

But at half-past twelve the *cortége* appeared.

The child was brought up in a perambulator which had at first been pushed by the under-nurse, an Italian, and accompanied by the upper-nurse, who was of course an Italian also. With them had been sent one of the Englishmen to show the way. Perhaps the two women had been somewhat ill-treated, as no true idea of the distance had been conveyed to them; and though they had now been some weeks at Manor Cross, they had never been half so far from the house. Of course the labour of the perambulator had soon fallen to the man; but the two nurses, who had been forced to walk a mile, had thought that they would never come to the end of their journey. When they did arrive they were full of plaints, which, however, no one could understand. But Popenjoy was at last brought to the Hall.

“My darling!” said the Marchioness, putting out both her arms. But Popenjoy, though a darling, screamed frightfully beneath his heap of clothes.

“You had better let him come into the room, mamma,” said Lady Susanna. Then the nurse carried him in, and one or two of his outer garments were taken from him.

“Dear me, how black he is!” said Lady Susanna.

The Marchioness turned upon her daughter in great anger. “The Germaines were always dark,” she said. “You’re dark yourself—quite as black as he is. My darling!”

She made another attempt to take the boy; but the nurse with voluble eloquence explained something which of course none of them understood.

The purport of her speech was an assurance that "Tavo," as she most unceremoniously called the child whom no German thought of naming otherwise than as Popenjoy, never would go to any "foreigner." The nurse therefore held him up to be looked at for two minutes while he still screamed, and then put him back into his covering raiments. "He is very black," said Lady Sarah, severely.

"So are some peoples' hearts," said the Marchioness, with a vigour for which her daughters had hardly given her credit. This, however, was borne without a murmur by the three sisters.

On the Friday the whole family, including all the Italian servants, migrated to London, and it certainly was the case that the lady took with her all her clothes and everything that she had brought with her. Toff had been quite right there. And when it came to be known by the younger ladies at Cross Hall that Toff had been right, they argued from the fact that their brother had concealed something of the truth when saying that he intended to go up to London only for a few days. There had been three separate carriages, and Toff was almost sure that the Italian lady had carried off more than she had brought with her, so exuberant had been the luggage. It was not long before Toff effected an entrance into the house, and brought away a report that very many things were missing. "The two little gilt cream-jugs is gone," she said to Lady Sarah, "and the minitshur with the pearl settings out of the yellow drawing-room!" Lady Sarah explained that as these things were the property of

her brother, he or his wife might of course take them away if so pleased. "She's got 'em unbeknownst to my lord, my lady," said Toff, shaking her head. "I could only just scurry through with half an eye; but when I comes to look there will be more, I warrant you, my lady."

The Marquis had expressed so much vehement dislike of everything about his English home, and it had become so generally understood that his Italian wife hated the place, that everybody agreed that they would not come back. Why should they? What did they get by living there? The lady had not been outside the house a dozen times, and only twice beyond the park-gate. The Marquis took no share in any county or any country pursuit. He went to no man's house and received no visitors. He would not see the tenants when they came to him, and had not even returned a visit except Mr. De Baron's. Why had he come there at all? That was the question which all the Brothershire people asked of each other, and which no one could answer. Mr. Price suggested that it was just devilry —to make everybody unhappy. Mrs. Toff thought that it was the woman's doing, because she wanted to steal silver mugs, miniatures, and such-like treasures. Mr. Waddy, the vicar of the parish, said that it was "a trial," having probably some idea in his own mind that the Marquis had been sent home by Providence as a sort of precious blister which would purify all concerned in him by counter-irritation. The old Marchioness still conceived that it had been brought about that a grandmother might take de-

light in the presence of her grandchild. Dr. Pountner said that it was impudence. But the Dean was of opinion that it had been deliberately planned with the view of passing off a supposititious child upon the property and title. The Dean, however, kept his opinion very much to himself.

Of course tidings of the migration were sent to Munster Court. Lady Sarah wrote to her brother, and the Dean wrote to his daughter.

"What shall you do, George? Shall you go and see him?"

"I don't know what I shall do?"

"Ought I to go?"

"Certainly not. You could only call on her, and she has not even seen my mother and sisters. When I was there he would not introduce me to her, though he sent for the child. I suppose I had better go. I do not want to quarrel with him if I can help it."

"You have offered to do everything together with him, if only he would let you.

"I must say that your father has driven me on in a manner which Brotherton would be sure to resent."

"Papa has done everything from a sense of duty, George."

"Perhaps so. I don't know how that is. It is very hard sometimes to divide a sense of duty from one's own interest. But it has made me very miserable—very wretched indeed."

"Oh George, is it my fault?"

"No, not your fault. If there is one thing

worse to me than another, it is the feeling of being divided from my own family. Brotherton has behaved badly to me."

"Very badly."

"And yet I would give anything to be on good terms with him. I think I shall go and call. He is at an hotel in Albemarle Street. I have done nothing to deserve ill of him, if he knew all."

It should, of course, be understood that Lord George did not at all know the state of his brother's mind towards him, except as it had been exhibited at that one interview which had taken place between them at Manor Cross. He was aware that in every conversation which he had had with the lawyers—both with Mr. Battle and Mr. Stokes—he had invariably expressed himself as desirous of establishing the legitimacy of the boy's birth. If Mr. Stokes had repeated to his brother what he had said, and had done him the justice of explaining that in all that he did he was simply desirous of performing his duty to the family, surely his brother would not be angry with him! At any rate it would not suit him to be afraid of his brother, and he went to the hotel. After being kept waiting in the hall for about ten minutes, the Italian courier came down to him. The Marquis at the present moment was not dressed, and Lord George did not like being kept waiting. Would Lord George call at three o'clock on the following day? Lord George said that he would, and was again at Scumberg's Hotel at three o'clock on the next afternoon.

CHAPTER X.

Lord George is troubled.

THIS was a day of no little importance to Lord George; so much so, that one or two circumstances which occurred before he saw his brother at the hotel must be explained. On that day there had come to him from the Dean a letter written in the Dean's best humour. When the house had been taken in Munster Court there had been a certain understanding, hardly quite a fixed assurance, that it was to be occupied up to the end of June, and that then Lord George and his wife should go into Brothershire. There had been a feeling ever since the marriage that while Mary preferred London, Lord George was wedded to the country. They had on the whole behaved well to each other in the matter. The husband, though he feared that his wife was surrounded by dangers, and was well aware that he himself was dallying on the brink of a terrible pitfall, would not urge a retreat before the time that had been named. And she, though she had ever before her eyes the fear of the dullness of Cross Hall, would not ask to have the time postponed. It was now the end of May, and a certain early day in July had been fixed for their retreat from London. Lord George had, with a good grace, promised to spend a few days at the

Deanery before he went to Cross Hall, and had given Mary permission to remain there for some little time afterwards. Now there had come a letter from the Dean full of smiles and pleasantness about this visit. There were tidings in it about Mary's horse, which was still kept at the Deanery, and comfortable assurances of sweetest welcome. Not a word had been said in this letter about the terrible family matter. Lord George, though he was at the present moment not disposed to think in the most kindly manner of his father-in-law, appreciated this, and had read the letter aloud to his wife at the breakfast-table with pleasant approbation. As he left the house to go to his brother, he told her that she had better answer her father's letter, and had explained to her where she would find it in his dressing-room.

But on the previous afternoon he had received at his club another letter, the nature of which was not so agreeable. This letter had not been pleasant even to himself, and certainly was not adapted to give pleasure to his wife. After receiving it he had kept it in the close custody of his breast-pocket; and when, as he left the house, he sent his wife to find that which had come from her father, he certainly thought that this prior letter was at the moment secure from all eyes within the sanctuary of his coat. But it was otherwise. With that negligence to which husbands are so specially subject, he had made the Dean's letter safe next to his bosom, but had left the other epistle unguarded. He had not only left it unguarded, but had ab-

solutely so put his wife on the track of it that it was impossible that she should not read it.

Mary found the letter and did read it before she left her husband's dressing-room — and the letter was as follows:

“Dearest George.” When she read the epithet, which she and she only was entitled to use, she paused for a moment, and all the blood rushed up into her face. She had known the handwriting instantly, and at the first shock she put the paper down upon the table. For a second there was a feeling prompting her to read no further. But it was only for a second. Of course she would read it. It certainly never would have occurred to her to search her husband's clothes for letters. Up to this moment she had never examined a document of his except at his bidding or in compliance with his wish. She had suspected nothing, found nothing, had entertained not even any curiosity about her husband's affairs. But now must she not read this letter to which he himself had directed her? Dearest George! And that in the handwriting of her friend—her friend!—Adelaide Houghton—in the handwriting of the woman to whom her husband had been attached before he had known herself! Of course she read the letter.

“DEAREST GEORGE,—I break my heart when you don't come to me; for heaven's sake be here to-morrow. Two, three, four, five, six, seven—I shall be here any hour till you come. I don't dare to tell the man that I am not at home to anybody

else, but you must take your chance. Nobody ever does come till after three or after six. He never comes home till half-past seven. Oh me! what is to become of me when you go out of town? There is nothing to live for, nothing — only you. Anything that you write is quite safe. Say that you love me."

"A."

The letter had grieved him when he got it—as had other letters before that. And yet it flattered him, and the assurance of the woman's love had in it a certain candied sweetness which prevented him from destroying the paper instantly, as he ought to have done. Could his wife have read all his mind in the matter her anger would have been somewhat mollified. In spite of the candied sweetness he hated the correspondence. It had been the woman's doing and not his. It is so hard for a man to be a Joseph! The Potiphar's wife of the moment has probably had some encouragement—and after that Joseph can hardly flee unless he be very stout indeed. This Joseph would have fled, though after a certain fashion he liked the woman, had he been able to assure himself that the fault had in no degree been his. But looking back, he thought that he had encouraged her, and did not know how to fly. Of all this Mary knew nothing. She only knew that old Mr. Houghton's wife, who professed to be her dear friend, had written a most foul love-letter to her husband, and that her husband had preserved it carefully, and had then, through manifest mistake, delivered it over into her hands.

She read it twice, and then stood motionless for a few minutes thinking what she would do. Her first idea was that she would tell her father. But that she soon abandoned. She was grievously offended with her husband; but, as she thought of it, she became aware that she did not wish to bring on him any anger but her own. Then she thought that she would start immediately for Berkeley Square, and say what she had to say to Mrs. Houghton. As this idea presented itself to her, she felt that she could say a good deal. But how would that serve her? Intense as was her hatred at present against Adelaide, Adelaide was nothing to her in comparison with her husband. For a moment she almost thought that she would fly after him, knowing, as she did, that he had gone to see his brother at Scumberg's Hotel. But at last she resolved that she would do nothing and say nothing till he should have perceived that she had read the letter. She would leave it open on his dressing-table, so that he might know immediately on his return what had been done. Then it occurred to her that the servants might see the letter if she exposed it. So she kept in her pocket, and determined that when she heard his knock at the door she would step into his room, and place the letter ready for his eyes. After that she spent the whole day in thinking of it, and read the odious words over and over again till they were fixed in her memory. "Say that you love me!" Wretched viper! ill-conditioned traitor! Could it be that he, her husband, loved this woman better than her? Did not all the world

know that the woman was plain, and affected, and vulgar, and odious? "Dearest George!" The woman could not have used such language without his sanction. Oh—what should she do? Would it not be necessary that she should go back and live with her father? Then she thought of Jack De Baron. They called Jack De Baron wild; but he would not have been guilty of wickedness such as this. She clung, however, to the resolution of putting the letter ready for her husband, so that he should know that she had read it before they met.

In the meantime Lord George, ignorant as yet of the storm which was brewing at home, was shown into his brother's sitting-room. When he entered he found there, with his brother, a lady whom he could recognise without difficulty as his sister-in-law. She was a tall, dark woman, as he thought very plain, but with large bright eyes and very black hair. She was ill-dressed, in a morning wrapper, and looked to him to be at least as old as her husband. The Marquis said something to her in Italian which served as an introduction, but of which Lord George could not understand a word. She curtseyed and Lord George put out his hand. "It is perhaps as well that you should make her acquaintance," said the Marquis. Then he again spoke in Italian, and after a minute or two the lady withdrew. It occurred to Lord George afterwards that the interview had certainly been arranged. Had his brother not wished him to see the lady, the lady could have been kept in the background here as well as at Manor Cross. "It's uncommon civil of you to come,"

said the Marquis, as soon as the door was closed.
"What can I do for you?"

"I did not like that you should be in London without my seeing you."

"I daresay not. I daresay not. I was very much obliged to you, you know, for sending that lawyer down to me."

"I did not send him."

"And particularly obliged to you for introducing that other lawyer into our family affairs."

"I would have done nothing of the kind if I could have helped it. If you will believe me, Brotherton, my only object is to have all this so firmly settled that there may not be need of further inquiry at a future time."

"When I am dead?"

"When we may both be dead."

"You have ten years advantage of me. Your own chance isn't bad."

"If you will believe me——"

"But suppose I don't believe you! Suppose I think that in saying all that, you are lying like the very devil!" Lord George jumped in his chair, almost as though he had been shot. "My dear fellow, what's the good of this humbug? You think you've got a chance. I don't believe you were quick enough to see it yourself, but your father-in-law has put you up to it. He is not quite such an ass as you are; but even he is ass enough to fancy that because I, an Englishman, have married an Italian lady, therefore the marriage may, very likely, be good for nothing."

"We only want proof."

"Does anybody ever come to you and ask you for proofs of your marriage with that very nice young woman, the Dean's daughter?"

"Anybody may find them at Brotherton."

"No doubt. And I can put my hand on the proofs of my marriage when I want to do so. In the meantime I doubt whether you can learn anything to your own advantage by coming here."

"I didn't want to learn anything."

"If you would look after your own wife a little closer, I fancy it would be a better employment for you. She is at present probably amusing herself with Captain De Baron."

"That is calumny," said Lord George, rising from his chair.

"No doubt. Any imputation coming from me is calumny. But you can make imputations as heavy and as hard as you please—and all in the way of honour. I've no doubt you'll find her with Captain De Baron, if you'll go and look."

"I should find her doing nothing that she ought not to do," said the husband, turning round for his hat and gloves.

"Or perhaps making a speech at the Rights of Women Institute on behalf of that German Baroness, who, I'm told, is in gaol. But, George, don't you take it too much to heart. You've got the money. When a man goes into a stable for his wife, he can't expect much in the way of conduct or manners. If he gets the money he ought to be contented." He had to hear it all to the last bitter

word before he could escape from the room and make his way out into the street.

It was at this time about four o'clock, and in his agony of mind he had turned down towards Piccadilly before he could think what he would do with himself for the moment. Then he remembered that Berkeley Square was close to him on the other side, and that he had been summoned there about this hour. To give him his due, it should be owned that he had no great desire to visit Berkeley Square in his present condition of feeling. Since the receipt of that letter, which was now awaiting him at home, he had told himself half-a-dozen times that he must and would play the part of Joseph. He had so resolved when she had first spoken to him of her passion, now some months ago; and then his resolution had broken down merely because he had not at the moment thought any great step to be necessary. But now it was clear that some great step was necessary. He must make her know that it did not suit him to be called "dearest George" by her, or to be told to declare that he loved her. And this accusation against his wife, made in such coarse and brutal language by his brother, softened his heart to her. Why, oh why, had he allowed himself to be brought up to a place he hated as he had always hated London! Of course Jack De Baron made him unhappy, though he was at the present moment prepared to swear that his wife was as innocent as any woman in London.

But now, as he was so near, and as his decision must be declared in person, he might as well go to

Berkeley Square. As he descended Hay Hill he put his hand into his pocket for the lady's letter, and pulled out that from the Dean, which he had intended to leave with his wife. In an instant he knew what he had done. He remembered it all, even to the way in which he had made the mistake with the two letters. There could be no doubt but that he had given Adelaide Houghton's letter into his wife's hands, and that she had read it. At the bottom of Hill Street, near the stables, he stopped suddenly and put his hand up to his head. What should he do now? He certainly could not pay his visit in Berkeley Square. He could not go and tell Mrs. Houghton that he loved her, and certainly would not have strength to tell her that he did not love her while suffering such agony as this. Of course he must see his wife. Of course he must—if I may use the slang phrase—of course he must “have it out with her,” after some fashion, and the sooner the better. So he turned his steps homewards across the Green Park. But, in going homewards, he did not walk very fast.

What would she do? How would she take it? Of course women daily forgive such offences; and he might probably, after the burst of the storm was over, succeed in making her believe that he did in truth love her, and did not love the other woman. In his present mood he was able to assure himself most confidently that such was the truth. He could tell himself now that he never wished to see Adelaide Houghton again. But, before anything of this could be achieved, he would have to own himself a sinner

before her. He would have, as it were, to grovel at her feet. Hitherto, in all his intercourse with her, he had been masterful and marital. He had managed up to this point so to live as to have kept in all respects the upper hand. He had never yet been found out even in a mistake or an indiscretion. He had never given her an opening for the mildest finding of fault. She, no doubt, was young, and practice had not come to her. But, as a natural consequence of this, Lord George had hitherto felt that an almost divine superiority was demanded from him. That sense of divine superiority must now pass away.

I do not know whether a husband's comfort is ever perfect till some family peccadilloes have been conclusively proved against him. I am sure that a wife's temper to him is sweetened by such evidence of human imperfection. A woman will often take delight in being angry; will sometimes wrap herself warm in prolonged sullenness; will frequently revel in complaint; but she enjoys forgiving better than aught else. She never feels that all the due privileges of her life have been accorded to her, till her husband shall have laid himself open to the caresses of a pardon. Then, and not till then, he is her equal; and equality is necessary for comfortable love. But the man, till he be well used to it, does not like to be pardoned. He has assumed divine superiority, and is bound to maintain it. Then, at last, he comes home some night with a little too much wine, or he cannot pay the weekly bills because he has lost too much money at cards, or he

has got into trouble at his office, and is in doubt for a fortnight about his place, or perhaps a letter from a lady falls into wrong hands. Then he has to tell himself that he has been "found out." The feeling is at first very uncomfortable; but it is, I think, a step almost necessary in reaching true matrimonial comfort. Hunting men say that hard rain settles the ground. A good scold with a "kiss and be friends" after it, perhaps, does the same.

Now Lord George had been found out. He was quite sure of that. And he had to undergo all that was unpleasant without sufficient experience to tell him that those clouds too would pass away quickly. He still walked homewards across St. James's Park, never stopping, but dragging himself along slowly, and when he came to his own door he let himself in very silently. She did not expect him so soon, and when he entered the drawing-room was startled to see him. She had not as yet put the letter, as she had intended, on his dressing-table, but still had it in her pocket; nor had it occurred to her that he would as yet have known the truth. She looked at him when he entered, but did not at first utter a word. "Mary," he said.

"Well, is anything the matter?"

It was possible that she had not found the letter—possible, though very improbable. But he had brought his mind so firmly to the point of owning what was to be owned and defending what might be defended, that he hardly wished for escape in that direction. At any rate, he was not prepared to

avail himself of it. "Did you find the letter?" he asked.

"I found a letter."

"Well!"

"Of course I am sorry to have intruded upon so private a correspondence. There it is." And she threw the letter to him. "Oh George!"

He picked up the letter, which had fallen to the ground, and, tearing it into bits, threw the fragments into the grate. "What do you believe about it, Mary?"

"Believe!"

"Do you think that I love anyone as I love you?"

"You cannot love me at all—unless that wicked wretched creature is a liar."

"Have I ever lied to you? You will believe me?"

"I do not know."

"I love no one in the world but you."

Even that almost sufficed for her. She already longed to have her arms round his neck and to tell him that it was all forgiven—that he at least was forgiven. During the whole morning she had been thinking of the angry words she would say to him, and of the still more angry words which she would speak of that wicked, wicked viper. The former were already forgotten; but she was not as yet inclined to refrain as to Mrs. Houghton. "Oh George, how could you bear such a woman as that—that you should let her write to you in such language? Have you been to her?"

"What, to-day?"

"Yes, to-day."

"Certainly not. I have just come from my brother."

"You will never go into the house again! You will promise that!"

Here was made the first direct attack upon his divine superiority! Was he, at his wife's instance, to give a pledge that he would not go into a certain house under any circumstances? This was the process of bringing his nose down to the ground which he had feared. Here was the first attempt made by his wife to put her foot on his neck. "I think that I had better tell you all that I can tell," he said.

"I only want to know that you hate her," said Mary.

"I neither hate her nor love her. I did—love her—once. You knew that."

"I never could understand it. I never did believe that you really could have loved her." Then she began to sob. "I shouldn't—ever—have taken you—if—I had."

"But from the moment when I first knew you it was all changed with me." As he said this he put out his arms to her, and she came to him. "There has never been a moment since in which you have not had all my heart."

"But why—why—why—" she sobbed, meaning to ask how it could have come to pass that the wicked viper could, in those circumstances, have written such a letter as that which had fallen into her hands.

The question certainly was not unnatural. But it was a question very difficult to answer. No man likes to say that a woman has pestered him with unwelcome love, and certainly Lord George was not the man to make such a boast. "Dearest Mary," he said, "on my honour as a gentleman I am true to you."

Then she was satisfied and turned her face to him and covered him with kisses. I think that morning did more than any day had done since their marriage to bring about the completion of her desire to be in love with her husband. Her heart was so softened towards him that she would not even press a question that would pain him. She had intended sternly to exact from him a pledge that he would not again enter the house in Berkeley Square, but she let even that pass by, because she would not annoy him. She gathered herself up close to him on the sofa, and drawing his arm over her shoulder, sobbed and laughed, stroking him with her hands as she crouched against his shoulder. But yet, every now and then, there came forth from her some violent ebullition against Mrs. Houghton. "Nasty creature! wicked, wicked beast! Oh George, she is so ugly!" And yet, before this little affair, she had been quite content that Adelaide Houghton should be her intimate friend.

It had been nearly five when Lord George reached the house, and he had to sit enduring his wife's caresses, and listening to devotion to himself and her abuses of Mrs. Houghton till past six. Then it struck him that a walk by himself would be good

for him. They were to dine out, but not till eight, and there would still be time. When he proposed it, she acceded at once. Of course she must go and dress, and equally of course he would not, could not go to Berkeley Square now. She thoroughly believed that he was true to her, but yet she feared the wiles of that nasty woman. They would go to the country soon, and then the wicked viper would not be near them.

Lord George walked across to Pall Mall, looked at an evening paper at his club, and then walked back again. Of course it had been his object to have a cool half-hour in which to think it all over—all that had passed between him and his wife, and also what had passed between him and his brother. That his wife was the dearest, sweetest woman in the world, he was quite sure. He was more than satisfied with her conduct to him. She had exacted from him very little penitence; had not required to put her foot in any disagreeable way upon his neck. No doubt she felt that his divine superiority had been vanquished, but she had uttered no word of triumph. With all that he was content. But what was he to do with Mrs. Houghton, as to whom he had sworn a dozen times within the last hour that she was quite indifferent to him. He now repeated the assertion to himself, and felt himself to be sure of the fact. But still he was her lover. He had allowed her so to regard him, and something must be done. She would write to him letters daily if he did not stop it; and every such letter not shown to his wife would be a new treason against her. This

was a great trouble. And then, through it all, those terrible words which his brother had spoken to him about Captain De Baron rang in his ears. This afternoon had certainly afforded no occasion to him to say a word about Captain De Baron to his wife. When detected in his own sin he could not allude to possible delinquencies on the other side. Nor did he think that there was any delinquency. But Cæsar said that Cæsar's wife should be above suspicion, and in that matter every man is a Cæsar to himself. Lady Susanna had spoken about this Captain, and Adelaide Houghton had said an ill-natured word or two, and he himself had seen them walking together. Now his brother had told him that Captain De Baron was his wife's lover. He did not at all like Captain De Baron.

CHAPTER XI.

Captain de Baron.

OF course as the next day or two passed by, the condition of Mrs. Houghton was discussed between Lord George and his wife. The affair could not be passed over without further speech. "I am quite contented with you," he said; "more than contented. But I suppose she does not feel herself contented with Mr. Houghton."

"Then why did she marry him?"

"Ah! why indeed?"

"A woman ought to be contented with her husband. But, at any rate, what right can she have to disturb other people? I suppose you never wrote her a love-letter."

"Never, certainly — since her marriage." This indeed was true. The lady had frequently written to him, but he had warily kept his hands from pen and ink, and had answered her letters by going to her.

"And yet she could persevere! Women can do such mean things! I would sooner have broken my heart and died than have asked a man to say that he loved me. I don't suppose you have much to be proud of. I daresay she has half-a-dozen others. You won't see her again?"

"I think I may be driven to do so. I do not

wish to have to write to her, and yet I must make her understand that all this is to be over."

"She'll understand that fast enough when she does not see you. It would have served her right to have sent that letter to her husband."

"That would have been cruel, Mary."

"I didn't do it. I thought of doing it, and wouldn't do it. But it would have served her right. I suppose she was always writing."

"She had written, but not quite like that," said Lord George. He was not altogether comfortable during this conversation.

"She writes lots of such letters, no doubt. You do then mean to go there again?"

"I think so. Of course I do not look upon her as being so utterly a castaway as you do."

"I believe her to be a heartless, vile, intriguing woman, who married an old man without caring a straw for him, and who doesn't care how miserable she makes other people. And I think she is very—very ugly. She paints frightfully. Anybody can see it. And as for false hair—why it's nearly all false." Lady George certainly did not paint, and had not a shred of false hair about her. "Oh, George, if you do go, do be firm. You will be firm; will you not?"

"I shall go simply that this annoyance may be at an end."

"Of course you will tell her that I will never speak to her again. How could I? You would not wish it; would you?" In answer to this there was nothing for him to say. He would have wished

that a certain amount of half-friendly intercourse should be carried on; but he could not ask her to do this. After a time he might perhaps be able to press on her the advantage of avoiding a scandal, but as yet he could not do even that. He had achieved more than he had a right to expect in obtaining her permission to call once more in Berkeley Square himself. After that they would soon be going down to Brotherton, and when they were there things might be allowed to settle themselves. Then she asked him another question. "You don't object to my going to Mrs. Jones's party on Thursday?"

The question was very sudden, so that he was almost startled. "It is a dance, I suppose."

"Oh yes; a dance, of course."

"No; I have no objection."

She had meant to ask him to reconsider his verdict against round dances, but she could hardly do so at that moment. She could not take advantage of her present strength to extract from him a privilege which under other circumstances he had denied to her. Were she to do so it would be as much as to declare that she meant to waltz because he had amused himself with Mrs. Houghton. Her mind was not at all that way given. But she did entertain an idea that something more of freedom should be awarded to her because her husband had given her cause of offence and had been forgiven. While he was still strong with that divine superiority which she had attributed to him, she had almost acknowledged to herself that he had a right to

demand that she should be dull and decorous. But now that she had found him to be in the receipt of clandestine love-letters, it did seem that she might allow herself a little liberty. She had forgiven him freely. She had really believed that in spite of the letter she herself was the woman he loved. She had said something to herself about men amusing themselves, and had told herself that though no woman could have written such a letter as that without disgracing herself altogether, a man might receive it and even keep it in his pocket without meaning very much harm. But the accident must, she thought, be held to absolve her from some part of the strictness of her obedience. She almost thought that she would waltz at Mrs. Jones's ball—perhaps not with Captain De Baron; perhaps not with much energy or with full enjoyment—but still sufficiently to disenthral herself. If possible she would say a word to her husband first. They were both going to a rather crowded affair at Lady Brabazon's before the night of Mrs. Jones's party. They had agreed that they would do little more than show themselves there. He was obliged to go to this special place and he hated staying. But even at Lady Brabazon's she might find an opportunity of saying what she wished to say.

On that day she took him out in her brougham, and on her return home was alone all the afternoon till about five; and then who should come to her but Captain De Baron. No doubt they two had become very intimate. She could not at all have defined her reasons for liking him. She was quite

sure of one thing—she was not in the least in love with him. But he was always gay, always good-humoured, always had plenty to say. He was the source of all the fun that ever came in her way; and fun was very dear to her. He was nice-looking and manly, and gentle withal. Why should she not have her friend? He would not write abominable letters and ask her to say that she loved him! And yet she was aware that there was a danger. She knew that her husband was a little jealous. She knew that Augusta Mildmay was frightfully jealous. That odious creature Mrs. Houghton had made ever so many nasty little allusions to her and Jack. When his name was announced she almost wished that he had not come; but yet she received him very pleasantly. He immediately began about the Baroness Banmann. The Baroness had on the previous evening made her way on to the platform at the Disabilities when Dr. Fleabody was lecturing, and Lady Selina was presiding, and had, to use Jack's own words, "Kicked up the most delightful bobbery that had ever been witnessed! She bundled poor old Lady Selina out of the chair."

"Nonsense!"

"So I am told: took the chair by the back and hoisted her out."

"Didn't they send for the police?"

"I suppose they did at last; but the American doctor was too many for her. The Baroness strove to address the meeting; but Olivia Q. Fleabody has become a favourite, and carried the day. I am told that at last the bald-headed old gentleman took the

Baroness home in a cab. I'd have given a five-pound note to be there. I think I must go some night and hear the Doctor."

"I wouldn't go again for anything."

"You women are all so jealous of each other. Poor Lady Selina! I'm told she was very much shaken."

"How did you hear it all?"

"From Aunt Ju," said the Captain. "Aunt Ju was there, of course. The Baroness tried to fly into Aunt Ju's arms, but Aunt Ju seems to have retired."

Then the quarrel must have been made up between Captain De Baron and Miss Mildmay. That was the idea which at once came into Mary's head. He could hardly have seen Aunt Ju without seeing her niece at the same time. Perhaps it was all settled. Perhaps, after all, they would be married. It would be a pity, because she was not half nice enough for him. And then Mary doubted whether Captain De Baron as a married man would be nearly so pleasant as in his present condition. "I hope Miss Mildmay is none the worse," she said.

"A little shaken in her nerves."

"Was—Augusta Mildmay there?"

"Oh dear no! It is quite out of her line. She is not at all disposed to lay aside the feebleesses of her sex and go into one of the learned professions. By-the-bye, I am afraid you and she are not very good friends."

"What makes you say that, Captain De Baron?"

"But are you?"

"I don't know why you should inquire."

"It is natural to wish that one's own friends should be friends."

"Has Miss Mildmay said—anything about—me?"

"Not a word; nor you about her. And therefore I know that something is wrong."

"The last time I saw her I did not think that Miss Mildmay was very happy," said Mary, in a low voice.

"Did she complain to you?" Mary had no answer ready for this question. She could not tell a lie easily, nor could she acknowledge the complaint which the lady had made, and had made so loudly. "I suppose she did complain," he said, "and I suppose I know the nature of her complaint."

"I cannot tell; though, of course, it was nothing to me."

"It is very much to me, though. I wish, Lady George, you could bring yourself to tell me the truth." He paused, but she did not speak. "If it were as I fear, you must know how much I am implicated. I would not for the world that you should think I am behaving badly."

"You should not permit her to think so, Captain De Baron."

"She doesn't think so. She can't think so. I am not going to say a word against her. She and I have been dear friends, and there is no one—hardly anyone—for whom I have a greater regard. But I do protest to you, Lady George, that I have

never spoken an untrue word to Augusta Mildmay in my life."

"I have not accused you."

"But has she? Of course it is a kind of thing that a man cannot talk about without great difficulty."

"Is it not a thing that a man should not talk about at all?"

"That is severe, Lady George; much more severe than I should have expected from your usual good nature. Had you told me that nothing had been said to you, there would have been an end of it. But I cannot bear to think that you should have been told that I had behaved badly, and that I should be unable to vindicate myself.

"Have you not been engaged to marry Miss Mildmay?"

"Never."

"Then why did you allow yourself to become so—so much to her?"

"Because I liked her. Because we were thrown together. Because the chances of things would have it so. Don't you know that that kind of thing is occurring every day? Of course, if a man were made up of wisdom and prudence and virtue and self-denial, this kind of thing wouldn't occur. But I don't think the world would be pleasanter if men were like that. Adelaide Houghton is Miss Mildmay's most intimate friend, and Adelaide has always known that I couldn't marry." As soon as Mrs. Houghton's name was mentioned a dark frown came across Lady George's brow. Captain De Baron

saw it, but did not as yet know anything of its true cause.

“Of course I am not going to judge between you,” said Lady George, very gravely.

“But I want you to judge me. I want you of all the world to feel that I have not been a liar and a blackguard.”

“Captain De Baron! how can you use such language?”

“Because I feel this very acutely. I do believe that Miss Mildmay has accused me to you. I do not wish to say a word against her. I would do anything in the world to protect her from the ill words of others. But I cannot bear that your mind should be poisoned against me. Will you believe me when I tell you that I have never said a word to Miss Mildmay which could possibly be taken as an offer of marriage?”

“I had rather give no opinion.”

“Will you ask Adelaide?”

“No; certainly not.” This she said with so much vehemence that he was thoroughly startled. “Mrs. Houghton is not among the number of my acquaintances.”

“Why not? What is the matter?”

“I can give no explanation, and I had rather that no questions should be asked. But so it is.”

“Has she offended Lord George?”

“Oh dear no! that is to say I cannot tell you anything more about it. You will never see me in Berkeley Square again. And now, pray say no more about it.”

"Poor Adelaide. Well, it does seem terrible that there should be such misunderstandings. She knows nothing about it. I was with her this morning, and she was speaking of you with the greatest affection." Mary struggled hard to appear indifferent to all this, but struggled in vain. She could not restrain herself from displaying her feeling. "May I not ask any further questions?"

"No, Captain De Baron."

"Nor hope that I may be a peacemaker between you?"

"Certainly not. I wish you wouldn't talk about it any more."

"I certainly will not if it offends you. I would not offend you for all the world. When you came up to town, Lady George, a few months ago, there were three or four of us that soon became such excellent friends! And now it seems that everything has gone wrong. I hope we need not quarrel —you and I?"

"I know no reason why we should."

"I have liked you so much. I am sure you have known that. Sometimes one does come across a person that one really likes; but it is so seldom."

"I try to like everybody," she said.

"I don't do that. I fear that at first starting I try to dislike everybody. I think it is natural to hate people the first time you see them."

"Did you hate me?" she asked, laughing.

"Oh, horribly, for two minutes. Then you laughed, or cried, or sneezed, or did something in a manner

that I liked, and I saw at once that you were the most charming human being in the world."

When a young man tells a young woman that she is the most charming human being in the world, he is certainly using peculiar language. In most cases the young man would be supposed to be making love to the young woman. Mary, however, knew very well that Captain De Baron was not making love to her. There seemed to be an understanding that all manner of things should be said between them, and that yet they should mean nothing. But, nevertheless, she felt that the language which this man had used to her would be offensive to her husband if he knew that it had been used when they two were alone together. Had it been said before a roomful of people it would not have mattered. And yet she could not rebuke him. She could not even look displeased. She had believed all that he had said to her about Augusta Mildmay, and was glad to believe it. She liked him so much, that she would have spoken to him as to a brother of the nature of her quarrel with Mrs. Houghton, only that, even to a brother, she would not have mentioned her husband's folly. When he spoke of her crying, or laughing, or sneezing, she liked the little attempt at drollery. She liked to know that he had found her charming. Where is the woman who does not wish to charm, and is not proud to think that she has succeeded with those whom she most likes? She could not rebuke him. She could not even avoid letting him see that she was pleased. "You have a dozen human beings in the world who

are the most delightful," she said, "and another dozen who are the most odious."

"Quite a dozen who are the most odious, but only one, Lady George, who is the most delightful." He had hardly said this when the door opened, and Lord George entered the room. Lord George was not a clever hypocrite. If he disliked a person he soon showed his dislike in his manner. It was very clear to both of them on the present occasion that he did not like the presence of Captain De Baron. He looked very gloomy—almost angry, and after speaking hardly more than a single word to his wife's guest, he stood, silent and awkward, leaning against the mantelpiece.

"What do you think Captain De Baron tells me?" Mary said, trying, but not very successfully, to speak with natural ease.

"I don't in the least know."

"There has been such a scene at the Women's Institute! That Baroness made a dreadful attack on poor Lady Selina Protest."

"She and the American female doctor were talking against each other from the same platform, at the same time," said De Baron.

"Very disgraceful!" said Lord George. "But then the whole thing is disgraceful, and always was. I should think Lord Plausible must be thoroughly ashamed of his sister." Lady Selina was sister to the Earl of Plausible, but, as all the world knew, was not on speaking terms with her brother.

"I suppose that unfortunate German lady will be put in prison," said Lady George.

"I only trust she may never be able to put her foot into your house again."

Then there was a pause. He was apparently so cross that conversation seemed to be impossible. The Captain would have gone away at once had he been able to escape suddenly. But there are times when it is very hard to get out of a room, at which a sudden retreat would imply a conviction that something was wrong. It seemed to him that for her sake he was bound to remain a few minutes longer. "When do you go down to Brothershire?" he asked.

"About the 7th of July," said Mary.

"Or probably earlier," said Lord George; at which his wife looked up at him, but without making any remark.

"I shall be down at my cousin's place some day in August," De Baron said. Lord George frowned more heavily than ever. "Mr. De Baron is going to have a large gathering of people about the end of the month."

"Oh, indeed!" said Mary.

"The Houghtons will be there." Then Mary also frowned. "And I have an idea that your brother, Lord George, has half promised to be one of the party."

"I know nothing at all about it."

"My cousin was up in town yesterday with the Houghtons. Good-bye, Lady George; I sha'n't be at Lady Brabazon's; because she has forgotten to invite me, but I suppose I shall see you at Mrs. Montacute Jones's?"

"I shall certainly be at Mrs. Montacute Jones's," said Mary, trying to speak cheerfully.

The bell was rung and the door was closed, and then the husband and wife were together. "A dreadful communication has just been made to me," said Lord George in his most solemn and funereal voice—"a most dreadful communication!"

CHAPTER XII.

A Dreadful Communication.

“A MOST dreadful communication!” There was something in Lord George’s voice as he uttered these words which so frightened his wife that she became at the moment quite pale. She was sure, almost sure, from his countenance, that the dreadful communication had some reference to herself. Had any great calamity happened in regard to his own family he would not have looked at her as he was now looking. And yet she could not imagine what might be the nature of the communication. “Has anything happened at Manor Cross?” she asked.

“It is not about Manor Cross.”

“Or your brother?”

“It is not about my brother; it does not in any way concern my family. It is about you.”

“About me! Oh George! do not look at me like that. What is it?”

He was very slow in the telling of the story; slow even in beginning to tell it; indeed, he hardly knew how to begin. “You know Miss Augusta Mildmay?” he asked.

Then she understood it all. She might have told him that he could spare himself all further trouble in telling, only that to do so would hardly have suited her purpose; therefore she had to listen

to the story, very slowly told. Miss Augusta Mildmay had written to him begging him to come to her. He, very much astonished at such a request, had nevertheless obeyed it; and Augusta Mildmay had assured him that his wife, by wicked wiles and lures, was interfering between her and her affianced lover Captain De Baron. Mary sat patiently till she had heard it all—sat almost without speaking a word; but there was a stern look on her face which he had never seen there before. Still he went on with his determined purpose. “These are the kind of things which are being repeated of you,” he said at last. “Susanna made the same complaint. And it had reached Brotherton’s ears. He spoke to me of it in frightfully strong language. And now this young lady tells me that you are destroying her happiness.”

“Well!”

“You can’t suppose that I can hear all this without uneasiness.”

“Do you believe it?”

“I do not know what to believe. I am driven mad.”

“If you believe it, George, if you believe a word of it, I will go away from you. I will go back to papa. I will not stay with you to be doubted.”

“That is nonsense.”

“It shall not be nonsense. I will not live to hear myself accused by my husband as to another man. Wicked young woman! Oh, what women are and what they can do! She has never been engaged to Captain De Baron.”

“What is that to you or me?”

"Nothing, if you had not told me that I stood in her way."

"It is not her engagement, or her hopes, whether ill or well founded, or his treachery to a lady, that concerns you and me, Mary; but that she should send for me and tell me to my face that you are the cause of her unhappiness. Why should she pitch upon you?"

"How can I say? Because she is very wicked."

"And why should Susanna feel herself obliged to caution me as to this Captain De Baron? She had no motive. She is not wicked."

"I don't know that."

"And why should my brother tell me that all the world is speaking of your conduct with this very man?"

"Because he is your bitterest enemy. George, do you believe it?"

"And why, when I come home with all this heavy on my heart, do I find this very man closeted with you?"

"Closeted with me!"

"You were alone with him."

"Alone with him! Of course I am alone with anyone who calls. Would you like me to tell the servant that Captain De Baron is to be excluded —so that all the world might know that you are jealous?"

"He must be excluded."

"Then you must do it. But it will be unnecessary. As you believe all this, I will tell my father everything and will go back to him. I will not live

here, George, to be so suspected that the very servants have to be told that I am not to be allowed to see one special man."

"No; you will go down into the country with me."

"I will not stay in the same house with you," she said, jumping up from her seat, "unless you tell me that you suspect me of nothing—not even of an impropriety. You may lock me up, but you cannot hinder me from writing to my father."

"I trust you will do nothing of the kind."

"Not tell him! Who then is to be my friend, if you turn against me? Am I to be all alone among a set of people who think nothing but ill of me?"

"I am to be your friend."

"But you think ill of me."

"I have not said so, Mary."

"Then say at once that you think no ill, and do not threaten me that I am to be taken into the country for protection. And when you tell me of the bold-faced villany of that young woman, speak of her with the disgust that she deserves; and say that your sister Susanna is suspicious and given to evil thoughts; and declare your brother to be a wicked slanderer if he has said a word against the honour of your wife. Then I shall know that you think no ill of me; and then I shall know that I may lean upon you as my real friend."

Her eyes flashed fire as she spoke, and he was silenced for the moment by an impetuosity and a passion which he had not at all expected. He was not quite disposed to yield to her, to assure her of

his conviction that those to whom she alluded were all wrong, and that she was all right; but yet he was beginning to wish for peace. That Captain De Baron was a pestilential young man, whose very business it was to bring unhappiness into families, he did believe; and he feared also that his wife had allowed herself to fall into an indiscreet intimacy with this destroyer of women's characters. Then there was that feeling of Cæsar's wife strong within his bosom, which he could, perhaps, have more fully explained to her but for that unfortunate letter from Mrs. Houghton. Any fault, however, of that kind on his part was, in his estimation, nothing to a fault on the part of his wife. She, when once assured that he was indifferent about Mrs. Houghton, would find no cause for unhappiness in the matter. But what would all the world be to him if his wife were talked about commonly in connection with another man? That she should not absolutely be a castaway would not save him from a perpetual agony which he would find to be altogether unendurable. He was, he was sure, quite right as to that theory about Cæsar's wife, even though, from the unfortunate position of circumstances, he could not dilate upon it at the present moment. "I think," he said, after a pause, "that you will allow that you had better drop this gentleman's acquaintance."

"I will allow nothing of the kind, George. I will allow nothing that can imply the slightest stain upon my name or upon your honour. Captain De Baron is my friend. I like him very much. A great many people know how intimate we are. They shall

never be taught to suppose that there was anything wrong in that intimacy. They shall never, at any rate, be taught so by anything that I will do. I will admit nothing. I will do nothing myself to show that I am ashamed. Of course you can take me into the country; of course you can lock me up if you like; of course you can tell all your friends that I have misbehaved myself; you can listen to calumny against me from everybody; but if you do I will have one friend to protect me, and I will tell papa everything." Then she walked away to the door as though she were leaving the room.

"Stop a moment," he said. Then she stood with her hand still on the lock, as though intending to stay merely till he should have spoken some last word to her. He was greatly surprised by her strength and resolution, and now hardly knew what more to say to her. He could not beg her pardon for his suspicion; he could not tell her that she was right; and yet he found it impossible to assert that she was wrong. "I do not think that passion will do any good," he said.

"I do not know what will do any good. I know what I feel."

"It will do good if you will allow me to advise you."

"What is your advice?"

"To come down to the country as soon as possible, and to avoid, as far as possible, seeing Captain De Baron before you go."

"That would be running away from Captain De

Baron. I am to meet him at Mrs. Montacute Jones's ball."

"Send an excuse to Mrs. Montacute Jones."

"You may do so, George, if you like. I will not. If I am told by you that I am not to meet this man, of course I shall obey you; but I shall consider myself to have been insulted—to have been insulted by you." As she said this his brow became very black. "Yes, by you. You ought to defend me from these people who tell stories about me, and not accuse me yourself. I cannot and will not live with you if you think evil of me." Then she opened the door, and slowly left the room. He would have said more had he known what to say. But her words came more fluently than his, and he was dumbfounded by her volubility; yet he was as much convinced as ever that it was his duty to save her from the ill-repute which would fall upon her from further intimacy with this captain. He could, of course, take her into the country to-morrow, if he chose to do so; but he could not hinder her from writing to the Dean; he could not debar her from pen and ink and the use of the post-office; nor could he very well forbid her to see her father.

Of course if she did complain to the Dean, she would tell the Dean everything. So he told himself. Now, when a man assumes the divine superiority of an all-governing husband, his own hands should be quite clean. Lord George's hands were by no means clean. It was not, perhaps, his own fault that they were dirty. He was able at any rate to tell himself that the fault had not been his. But there was that

undoubted love-letter from Mrs. Houghton. If the Dean were to question him about that he could not lie. And though he would assure himself that the fault had all been with the lady, he could not excuse himself by that argument in discussing the matter with the Dean. He was in such trouble that he feared to drive his wife to retaliation; and yet he must do his duty. His honour and her honour must be his first consideration. If she would only promise him not willingly to see Captain De Baron, there should be an end of it, and he would allow her to stay the allotted time in London; but if she would not do this, he thought that he must face the Dean and all his terrors.

But he hardly knew his wife—was hardly aware of the nature of her feelings. When she spoke of appealing to her father, no idea crossed her mind of complaining of her husband's infidelity. She would seek protection for herself, and would be loud enough in protesting against the slanderous tongues of those who had injured her. She would wage war to the knife against the Marquis, and against Lady Susanna, and against Augusta Mildmay, and would call upon her father to assist her in that warfare; but she would not condescend to allude to a circumstance which, if it were an offence against her, she had pardoned, but as to which, in her heart of hearts, she believed her husband to be, if not innocent, at least not very guilty. She despised Adelaide Houghton too much to think that her husband had really loved such a woman, and was too confident in herself to doubt his love for many min-

utes. She could hate Adelaide Houghton for making the attempt, and yet could believe that the attempt had been futile.

Nevertheless, when she was alone she thought much of Mrs. Houghton's letter. Throughout her interview with her husband she had thought of it, but had determined from the very first that she would not cast it in his teeth. She would do nothing ungenerous. But was it not singular that he should be able to upbraid her for her conduct, for conduct in which there had been no trespass, knowing as he must have known, feeling as he must have felt, that every word of that letter was dwelling in her memory! He had, at any rate, intended that the abominable correspondence should be clandestine. He must have been sadly weak, to make the least of it, to have admitted such a correspondence. "Pray tell me that you love me!" That had been the language addressed to him only a few days since by a married lady to whom he had once made an offer of marriage; and yet he could now come and trample on her as though his marital superiority had all the divinity of snow-white purity. This was absolute tyranny. But yet in complaining to her father of his tyranny, she would say nothing of Adelaide Houghton. Of the accusations made against herself, she would certainly tell her father, unless they were withdrawn as far as her own husband could withdraw them. For an hour after leaving him, her passion still sustained her. Was this to be her reward for all her endeavours to become a loving wife?

They were engaged to dine that evening with a certain Mrs. Patmore Green, who had herself been a Germain, and who had been first cousin to the late Marquis. Mary came down dressed into the drawing-room at the proper time, not having spoken another word to her husband, and there she found him also dressed. She had schooled herself to show no sign either of anger or regret, and as she entered the room said some indifferent words about the brougham. He still looked as dark as a thunder-cloud, but he rang the bell and asked the servant a question. The brougham was there, and away they went to Mrs. Patmore Green's. She spoke half-a-dozen words on the way, but he hardly answered her. She knew that he would not do so, being aware that it was not within his power to rise above the feelings of the moment. But she exerted herself so that he might know that she did not mean to display her ill-humour at Mrs. Patmore Green's house.

Lady Brabazon, whose sister had married a Germain, was there, and a Colonel Ansley, who was a nephew of Lady Brotherton's; so that the party was very much a Germain party. All these people had been a good deal exercised of late on the great Popenjoy question. So immense is the power of possession that the Marquis, on his arrival in town, had been asked to all the Germain houses in spite of his sins, and had been visited with considerable family affection and regard; for was he not the head of them all? But he had not received these offers graciously, and now the current of Germain opinion

was running against him. Of the general propriety of Lord George's conduct ever since his birth there had never been a doubt, and the Greens, and Brabazons, and Ansleys were gradually coming round to the opinion that he was right to make inquiries as to the little Popenjoy's antecedents. They had all taken kindly to Mary, though they were, perhaps, beginning to think that she was a little too frivolous, too fond of pleasure for Lord George. Mrs. Patmore Green, who was the wife of a very rich man, and the mother of a very large family, and altogether a very worthy woman, almost at once began to whisper to Mary: "Well, my dear, what news from Italy?"

"I never hear anything about it, Mrs. Green," said Mary, with a laugh.

"And yet the Dean is so eager, Lady George!"

"I won't let papa talk to me about it. Lord Brotherton is quite welcome to his wife, and his son, and everything else for me—only I do wish he would have remained away."

"I think we all wish that, my dear."

Mr. Patmore Green, and Colonel Ansley, and Lady Brabazon all spoke a word or two in the course of the evening to Lord George on the same subject, but he would only shake his head and say nothing. At that time this affair of his wife's was nearer to him and more burdensome to him than even the Popenjoy question. He could not rid himself of this new trouble even for a moment. He was still thinking of it when all the inquiries about Popenjoy were being made. What did it matter to

him how that matter should be settled, if all the happiness of his life were to be dispelled by this terrible domestic affliction? "I am afraid this quarrel with his brother will be too much for Lord George," said Mr. Patmore Green to his wife, when the company were gone. "He was not able to say a word the whole evening."

"And I never knew her to be more pleasant," said Mrs. Patmore Green. "She doesn't seem to care about it the least in the world." The husband and wife did not speak a word to each other as they went home in the brougham. Mary had done her duty by sustaining herself in public, but was not willing to let him think that she had as yet forgiven the cruelty of his suspicions.

CHAPTER XIII.

"I deny it."

DURING the whole of that night Lord George lay suffering from his troubles, and his wife lay thinking about them. Though the matter affected her future life almost more materially than his, she had the better courage to maintain her, and a more sustained conviction. It might be that she would have to leave her home and go back to the Deanery, and in that there would be utter ruin to her happiness. Let the result, however, be as it would, she could never own herself to have been one tittle astray, and she was quite sure that her father would support her in that position. The old *ruat cælum* feeling was strong within her. She would do anything she could for her husband short of admitting, by any faintest concession, that she had been wrong in reference to Captain De Baron. She would talk to him, coax him, implore him, reason with him, forgive him, love him, and caress him. She would try to be gentle with him this coming morning. But if he were obdurate in blaming her, she would stand on her own innocence and fight to the last gasp. He was supported by no such spirit of pugnacity. He felt it to be his duty to withdraw his wife from the evil influence of this man's attractions, but felt, at the same time, that he might possibly lack the

strength to do so. And then, what is the good of withdrawing a wife, if the wife thinks that she ought not to be withdrawn? There are sins as to which there is no satisfaction in visiting the results with penalties. The sin is in the mind, or in the heart, and is complete in its enormity, even though there be no result. He was miserable because she had not at once acknowledged that she never ought to see this man again, as soon as she had heard the horrors which her husband had told her. "George," she said to him at breakfast the next morning, "do not let us go on in this way together."

"In what way?"

"Not speaking to each other—condemning each other."

"I have not condemned you, and I don't know why you should condemn me."

"Because I think that you suspect me without a cause."

"I only tell you what people say!"

"If people told me bad things of you, George—that you were this, or that, or the other, should I believe them?"

"A woman's name is everything."

"Then do you protect my name. But I deny it. Her name should be as nothing when compared with her conduct. I don't like to be evil spoken of, but I can bear that, or anything else, if you do not think evil of me—you and papa." This reference to her father brought back the black cloud which her previous words had tended to dispel. "Tell me that you do not suspect me."

"I never said that I suspected you of anything."

"Say that you are sure that, in regard to this man, I never said, or did, or thought anything that was wrong. Come, George, have I not a right to expect that from you?" She had come round the table and was standing over him, touching his shoulder.

"Even then it would be better that you should go away from him."

"No!"

"I say that it would be better, Mary."

"And I say that it would be worse—much worse. What? Will you bid your wife make so much of any man as to run away from him? Will you let the world say that you think that I cannot be safe in his company? I will not consent to that, George. The running away shall not be mine. Of course you can take me away if you please, but I shall feel—"

"Well!"

"You know what I shall feel. I told you last night."

"What do you want me to do?" he asked, after a pause.

"Nothing."

"I am to hear these stories, and not even to tell you that I have heard them?"

"I did not say that, George. I suppose it is better that you should tell me. But I think you should say at the same time that you know them to be false." Even though they were false, there was that doctrine of Cæsar's wife which she would not

understand! "I think I should be told, and then left to regulate my own ways accordingly." This was mutinously imperious, and yet he did not quite know how to convince her of her mutiny. Through it all he was cowed by the remembrance of that love-letter, which, of course, was in her mind, but which she was either too generous or too wise to mention. He almost began to think that it was wisdom rather than generosity, feeling himself to be more cowed by her reticence than he would have been by her speech.

"You imagine, then, that a husband should never interfere?"

"Not to protect a wife from that from which she is bound to protect herself. If he has to do so, she is not worth the trouble, and he had better get rid of her. It is like preventing a man from drinking by locking up the wine."

"That has to be done sometimes."

"It sha'n't be done to me, George. You must either trust me, or we must part."

"I do trust you," he said, at last.

"Then let there be an end of all this trouble. Tell Susanna that you trust me. For your brother and that disappointed young woman I care nothing. But if I am to spend my time at Cross Hall, whatever they may think, I should not wish them to believe that you thought evil of me. And, George, don't suppose that, because I say that I will not run away from Captain De Baron, all this will go for nothing with me. I will not avoid Captain De Baron, but I will be careful to give no cause for ill-natured

words." Then she put her arm round his neck, and kissed him, and had conquered him.

When he went away from the house he had another great trouble before him. He had not seen Mrs. Houghton as yet since his wife had found that love-letter; but she had written to him often. She had sent notes to his club almost wild with love and anger—with that affectation of love and anger which some women know how to assume, and which so few men know how to withstand. It was not taken to be quite real, even by Lord George; and yet he could not withstand it. Mrs. Houghton, who understood the world thoroughly, had become quite convinced that Lady George had quarrelled with her. The two women had been very intimate ever since Lady George had been in town, and now for the last few days they had not seen each other. Mrs. Houghton had called twice, and had been refused. Then she had written, and had received no answer. She knew then that Mary had discovered something, and, of course, attributed her lover's absence to the wife's influence. But it did not occur to her that she should, on this account, give up her intercourse with Lord George. Scenes, quarrels, reconciliations, troubles, recriminations, jealousies, resolves, petty triumphs, and the general upsetting of the happiness of other people—these were to her the sweets of what she called a passion. To give it all up because her lover's wife had found her out, and because her lover was in trouble, would be to abandon her love just when it was producing the desired fruit. She wrote short letters and long letters, angry letters and

most affectionate letters to Lord George at his club, entreating him to come to her, and almost driving him out of his wits. He had, from the first, determined that he would go to her. He had even received his wife's sanction for doing so; but, knowing how difficult it would be to conduct such an interview, had hitherto put off the evil hour. But now a day and an hour had been fixed, and the day and the hour had come. The hour had very nearly come. When he left his house there was still time for him to sit for awhile at his club, and think what he would say to this woman.

He wished to do what was right. There was not a man in England less likely to have intended to amuse himself with a second love within twelve months of his marriage than Lord George Germain. He had never been a Lothario—had never thought himself to be gifted in that way. In the first years of his manhood, when he had been shut up at Manor Cross, looking after his mother's limited means, with a full conviction that it was his duty to sacrifice himself to her convenience, he had been apt to tell himself that he was one of those men who have to go through life without marrying—or loving. Though strikingly handsome, he had never known himself to be handsome. He had never thought himself to be clever, or bright, or agreeable. High birth had been given to him, and a sense of honour. Of those gifts he had been well aware and proud enough, but had taken credit to himself for nothing else. Then had come that startling episode of his life in which he had fallen in love with Adelaide De Baron, and then

the fact of his marriage with Mary Lovelace. Looking back at it now, he could hardly understand how it had happened that he had either fallen in love or married. He certainly was not now the least in love with Mrs. Houghton. And, though he did love his wife dearly, though the more he saw of her the more he admired her, yet his marriage had not made him happy. He had to live on her money, which galled him, and to be assisted by the Dean's money, which was wormwood to him. And he found himself to be driven whither he did not wish to go, and to be brought into perils from which his experience did not suffice to extricate him. He always repented the step he had taken in regard to his brother, knowing that it was the Dean who had done it, and not he himself. Had he not married, he might well have left the battle to be fought in after years—when his brother should be dead, and very probably he himself also.

He was aware that he must be very firm with Mrs. Houghton. Come what might he must give her to understand quite clearly that all love-making must be over between them. The horrors of such a condition of things had been made much clearer to him than before by his own anxiety in reference to Captain De Baron. But he knew himself to be too soft-hearted for such firmness. If he could send someone else, how much better it would be! But, alas! this was a piece of work which no deputy could do for him. Nor could a letter serve as a deputy. Let him write as carefully as he might, he must say things which would condemn him utterly

were they to find their way into Mr. Houghton's hands. One terrible letter had gone astray, and why not another?

She had told him to be in Berkeley Square at two, and he was there very punctually. He would at the moment have given much to find the house full of people; but she was quite alone. He had thought that she would receive him with a storm of tears, but when he entered she was radiant with smiles. Then he remembered how on a former occasion she had deceived him, making him believe that all her lures to him meant little or nothing just when he had determined to repudiate them because he had feared that they meant so much. He must not allow himself to be won in that way again. He must be firm, even though she smiled. “What is all this about?” she said in an affected whisper as soon as the door was closed. He looked very grave and shook his head. “‘Thou canst not say I did it. Never shake thy gory locks at me.’ That wife of yours has found out something, and has found it out from you, my lord.”

“Yes, indeed.”

“What has she found out?”

“She read a letter to me which you sent to the club.”

“Then I think it very indecent behaviour on her part. Does she search her husband's correspondence? I don't condescend to do that sort of thing.”

“It was my fault. I put it into her hands by mistake. But that does not matter.”

"Not matter! It matters very much to me, I think. Not that I care. She cannot hurt me. But, George, was not that careless—very careless; so careless as to be—unkind?"

"Of course it was careless."

"And ought you not to think more of me than that? Have you not done me an injury, sir, when you owed me all solicitude and every possible precaution?" This was not to be denied. If he chose to receive such letters, he was bound at any rate to keep them secret. "But men are so foolish—so little thoughtful! What did she say, George?"

"She behaved like an angel."

"Of course. Wives in such circumstances always do. Just a few drops of anger, and then a deluge of forgiveness. That was it, was it not?"

"Something like it."

"Of course. It happens every day—because men are so stupid, but at the same time so necessary. But what did she say of me? Was she angel on my side of the house as well as yours?"

"Of course she was angry."

"It did not occur to her that she had been the interloper, and had taken you away from me?"

"That was not so. You had married."

"Psha! Married! Of course I had married. Everybody marries. You had married; but I did not suppose that for that reason you would forget me altogether. People must marry as circumstances suit. It is no good going back to that old story. Why did you not come to me sooner, and tell me

of this tragedy? Why did you leave me to run after her and write to her?”

“I have been very unhappy.”

“So you ought to be. But things are never so bad in the wearing as in the anticipation. I don’t suppose she’ll go about destroying my name and doing me a mischief?”

“Never.”

“Because if she did, you know, I could retaliate.”

“What do you mean by that, Mrs. Houghton?”

“Nothing that need disturb you, Lord George. Do not look such daggers at me. But women have to be forbearing to each other. She is your wife, and you may be sure I shall never say a nasty word about her—unless she makes herself very objectionable to me.”

“Nobody can say nasty things about her.”

“That is all right, then. And now what have you to say to me about myself? I am not going to be gloomy because a little misfortune has happened. It is not my philosophy to cry after spilt milk.”

“I will sit down a minute,” he said; for hitherto he had been standing.

“Certainly; and I will sit opposite to you, for ten minutes if you wish it. I see that there is something to be said. What is it?”

“All that has passed between you and me for the last month or two must be forgotten.”

“Oh, this is it!”

"I will not make her miserable, nor will I bear a burden upon my own conscience."

"Your conscience! What a speech for a man to make to a woman! And how about my conscience? And then one thing further. You say that it must be all forgotten?"

"Yes, indeed."

"Can you forget it?"

"I can strive to do so. By forgetting, one means laying it aside. We remember chiefly those things which we try to remember."

"And you will not try to remember me in the least? You will lay me aside like an old garment? Because this—angel—has come across a scrawl which you were too careless either to burn or to lock up! You will tell yourself to forget me as you would a servant you had dismissed—much more easily than you would a dog? Is that so?"

"I did not say that I could do it easily."

"You shall not do it at all. I will not be forgotten. Did you ever love me, sir?"

"Certainly I did. You know that I did."

"When? How long since? Have you ever sworn that you loved me since this—angel—has been your wife?" Looking back as well as he could, he rather thought that he never had sworn that he loved her in these latter days. She had often bidden him to do so; but as far as he could recollect at the moment, he had escaped the absolute utterance of the oath by some subterfuge. But doubtless he had done that which had been tantamount to swearing; and, at any rate, he could not

now say that he had never sworn. “Now you come to tell me that it must all be forgotten! Was it she taught you that word?”

“If you upbraid me I will go away.”

“Go, sir, if you dare. You first betray me to your wife by your egregious folly, and then tell me that you will leave me because I have a word to say for myself. Oh George, I expected more tenderness than that from you.”

“There is no use in being tender. It can only produce misery and destruction.”

“Well, of all the cold-blooded speeches I ever heard that is the worst. After all that has passed between us, you do not scruple to tell me that you cannot even express tenderness for me, lest it should bring you into trouble! Men have felt that before, I do not doubt; but I hardly think any man was ever hard enough to make such a speech. I wonder whether Captain De Baron is so considerate.”

“What do you mean by that?”

“You come here and talk to me about your angel, and then tell me that you cannot show me even the slightest tenderness, lest it should make you miserable, and you expect me to hold my tongue.”

“I don’t know why you should mention Captain De Baron.”

“I’ll tell you why, Lord George. There are five or six of us playing this little comedy. Mr. Houghton and I are married, but we have not very much to say to each other. It is the same with you and Mary.”

"I deny it."

"I daresay; but at the same time you know it to be true. She consoles herself with Captain De Baron. With whom Mr. Houghton consoles himself I have never taken the trouble to inquire. I hope someone is good-natured to him, poor old soul. Then, as to you and me—you used, I think, to get consolation here. But such comforts cost trouble, and you hate trouble." As she said this, she wound her arm inside his; and he, angry as he was with her for speaking as she had done of his wife, could not push her from him roughly. "Is not that how it is, George?"

"No."

"Then I don't think you understand the play as well as I do."

"No! I deny it all."

"All?"

"Everything about Mary. It's a slander to mention that man's name in connection with her—a calumny which I will not endure."

"How is it, then, if they mention mine in connection with you?"

"I am saying nothing about that."

"But I suppose you think of it. I am hardly of less importance to myself than Lady George is to herself. I did think I was not of less importance to you."

"Nobody ever was or ever can be of so much importance to me as my wife, and I will be on good terms with no one who speaks evil of her."

"They may say what they like of me?"

“Mr. Houghton must look to that.”

“It is no business of yours, George?”

He paused a moment, and then found the courage to answer her. “No—none,” he said. Had she confined herself to her own assumed wrongs, her own pretended affection—had she contented herself with quarrelling with him for his carelessness, and had then called upon him for some renewed expression of love—he would hardly have been strong enough to withstand her. But she could not keep her tongue from speaking evil of his wife. From the moment in which he had called Mary an angel, it was necessary to her comfort to malign the angel. She did not quite know the man, or the nature of men generally. A man, if his mind be given that way, may perhaps with safety whisper into a woman’s ear that her husband is untrue to her. Such an accusation may serve his purpose. But the woman, on her side, should hold her peace about the man’s wife. A man must be very degraded indeed if his wife be not holy to him. Lord George had been driving his wife almost mad during the last twenty-four hours by implied accusations, and yet she was to him the very holy of holies. All the Popenjoy question was as nothing to him in comparison with the sanctity of her name. And now, weak as he was, incapable as he would have been, under any other condition of mind, of extricating himself from the meshes which this woman was spinning for him, he was enabled to make an immediate and most salutary plunge by the genuine anger she had produced. “No, none,” he said.

"Oh, very well. The angel is everything to you, and I am nothing?"

"Yes; my wife is everything to me."

"How dared you, then, come here and talk to me of love? Do you think I will stand this—that I will endure to be treated in this way? Angel, indeed! I tell you that she cares more for Jack De Baron's little finger than for your whole body. She is never happy unless he is with her. I don't think very much of my cousin Jack, but to her he is a god."

"It is false."

"Very well. It is nothing to me; but you can hardly expect, my lord, that I should hear from you such pleasant truths as you have just told me, and not give you back what I believe to be truth in return."

"Have I spoken evil of anyone? But I will not stay here, Mrs. Houghton, to make recriminations. You have spoken most cruelly of a woman who never injured you, who has always been your firm friend. It is my duty to protect her, and I shall always do so in all circumstances. Good-morning." Then he went before she could say another word to him.

He would perhaps have been justified had he been a little proud of the manner in which he had carried himself through this interview; but he entertained no such feeling. To the lady he had just left he feared that he had been rough and almost cruel. She was not to him the mass of whipped cream turned sour which she may perhaps be to the reader. Though he had been stirred to anger, he had been

indignant with circumstances rather than with Mrs. Houghton. But in truth the renewed accusation against his wife made him so wretched that there was no room in his breast for pride. He had been told that she liked Jack De Baron's little finger better than his whole body, and had been so told by one who knew both his wife and Jack De Baron. Of course there had been spite and malice and every possible evil passion at work. But then everybody was saying the same thing. Even though there were not a word of truth in it, such a rumour alone would suffice to break his heart. How was he to stop cruel tongues, especially the tongue of this woman, who would now be his bitterest enemy? If such things were repeated by all connected with him, how would he be able to reconcile his own family to his wife? There was nothing which he valued now but the place of respect which he held in his own family and that which his wife might hold. And in his own mind he could not quite acquit her. She would not be made to understand that she might injure his honour and destroy his happiness even though she committed no great fault. To take her away with a strong hand seemed to be his duty. But then there was the Dean, who would most certainly take her part; and he was afraid of the Dean.

CHAPTER XIV.

Popenjoy is Popenjoy.

THEN came Lady Brabazon's party. Lord George said nothing further to his wife about Jack De Baron for some days after that storm in Berkeley Square —nor did she to him. She was quite contented that matters should remain as they now were. She had vindicated herself, and, if he made no further accusation, she was willing to be appeased. He was by no means contented—but as a day had been fixed for them to leave London, and that day was now but a month absent, he hardly knew how to insist upon an alteration of their plans. If he did so he must declare war against the Dean, and, for a time, against his wife also. He postponed, therefore, any decision, and allowed matters to go on as they were. Mary was no doubt triumphant in her spirit. She had conquered him for a time, and felt that it was so. But she was, on that account, more tender and observant to him than ever. She even offered to give up Lady Brabazon's party altogether. She did not much care for Lady Brabazon's party, and was willing to make a sacrifice that was perhaps no sacrifice. But to this he did not assent. He declared himself to be quite ready for Lady Brabazon's party, and to Lady Brabazon's party they went. As she was on the

staircase she asked him a question. "Do you mind my having a waltz to-night?" He could not bring himself for the moment to be stern enough to refuse. He knew that the pernicious man would not be there. He was quite sure that the question was not asked in reference to the pernicious man. He did not understand, as he should have done, that a claim was being made for general emancipation, and he muttered something which was intended to imply assent. Soon afterwards she took two or three turns with a stout, middle-aged gentleman, a Count somebody, who was connected with the German embassy. Nothing on earth could have been more harmless or apparently uninteresting. Then she signified to him that she had done her duty to Lady Brabazon, and was quite ready to go home. "I'm not particularly bored," he said; "don't mind me." "But I am," she whispered, laughing; "and as I know you don't care about it, you might as well take me away." So he took her home. They were not there above half an hour, but she had carried her point about the waltzing.

On the next day the Dean came to town to attend a meeting at Mr. Battle's chambers, by appointment. Lord George met him there, of course, as they were at any rate supposed to act in strict concert; but on these days the Dean did not stay in Munster Court when in London.

He would always visit his daughter, but would endeavour to do so in her husband's absence, and was unwilling even to dine there. "We shall be better friends down at Brotherton," he said to her.

"He is always angry with me after discussing this affair of his brother's; and I am not quite sure that he likes seeing me here." This he had said on a previous occasion, and now the two men met in Lincoln's Inn Fields, not having even gone there together.

At this meeting the lawyer told them a strange story, and one which to the Dean was most unsatisfactory—one which he resolutely determined to disbelieve. "The Marquis," said Mr. Battle, "had certainly gone through two marriage ceremonies with the Italian lady, one before the death and one after the death of her first reputed husband. And as certainly the so-called Popenjoy had been born before the second ceremony." So much the Dean believed very easily, and the information tallied altogether with his own views. If this was so, the so-called Popenjoy could not be a real Popenjoy, and his daughter would be Marchioness of Brotherton when this wicked ape of a marquis should die; and her son, should she have one, would be the future marquis. But then there came the remainder of the lawyer's story. Mr. Battle was inclined, from all that he had learned, to believe that the Marchioness had never really been married at all to the man whose name she had first borne, and that the second marriage had been celebrated merely to save appearances.

"What appearances!" exclaimed the Dean. Mr. Battle shrugged his shoulders. Lord George sat in gloomy silence. "I don't believe a word of it," said the Dean.

Then the lawyer went on with his story. This lady had been betrothed early in life to the Marchese Luigi; but the man had become insane—partially insane and by fits and starts. For some reason, not as yet understood, which might probably never be understood, the lady's family had thought it expedient that the lady should bear the name of the man to whom she was to be married. She had done so for some years, and had been in possession of some income belonging to him. But Mr. Battle was of opinion that she had never been Luigi's wife. Further inquiries might possibly be made, and might add to further results. But they would be very expensive. A good deal of money had already been spent. "What did Lord George wish?"

"I think we have done enough," said Lord George, slowly—thinking also that he had been already constrained to do much too much.

"It must be followed out to the end," said the Dean. "What! Here is a woman who professed for years to be a man's wife, who bore his name, who was believed by everybody to have been his wife—"

"I did not say that, Mr. Dean," interrupted the lawyer.

"Who lived on the man's revenues as his wife, and even bore his title, and now in such an emergency as this we are to take a cock-and-bull story as gospel. Remember, Mr. Battle, what is at stake."

"Very much is at stake, Mr. Dean, and there-

fore these inquiries have been made—at a very great expense. But our own evidence, as far as it goes, is all against us. The Luigi family say that there was no marriage. Her family say that there was, but cannot prove it. The child may die, you know."

"Why should he die?" asked Lord George.

"I am trying the matter all round, you know. I am told the poor child is in ill-health. One has got to look at probabilities. Of course you do not abandon a right by not prosecuting it now."

"It would be a cruelty to the boy to let him be brought up as Lord Popenjoy and afterwards dispossessed," said the Dean.

"You, gentlemen, must decide," said the lawyer. "I only say that I do not recommend further steps."

"I will do nothing further," said Lord George. "In the first place I cannot afford it."

"We will manage that between us," said the Dean. "We need not trouble Mr. Battle with that. Mr. Battle will not fear but that all expenses will be paid."

"Not in the least," said Mr. Battle, smiling.

"I do not at all believe the story," said the Dean. "It does not sound like truth. If I spent my last shilling in sifting the matter to the bottom, I would go on with it. Though I were obliged to leave England for twelve months myself, I would do it. A man is bound to ascertain his own rights."

"I will have nothing more to do with it," said

Lord George, rising from his chair. "As much has been done as duty required; perhaps more. Mr. Battle, good-morning. If we could know as soon as possible what this unfortunate affair has cost, I shall be obliged." He asked his father-in-law to accompany him, but the Dean said that he would speak a word or two further to Mr. Battle and remained.

At his club Lord George was much surprised to find a note from his brother. The note was as follows:

"Would you mind coming to me here to-morrow or the next day at 3?"

B.

"Scumberg's Hotel, Tuesday."

This to Lord George was very strange indeed. He could not but remember all the circumstances of his former visit to his brother—how he had been insulted, how his wife had been vilified, how his brother had heaped scorn on him. At first he thought that he was bound to refuse to do as he was asked. But why should his brother ask him? And his brother was his brother—the head of his family. He decided at last that he would go, and left a note himself at Scumberg's Hotel that evening, saying that he would be there on the morrow.

He was very much perplexed in spirit as he thought of the coming interview. He went to the Dean's club and to the Dean's hotel, hoping to find the Dean, and thinking that as he had consented to act with the Dean against his brother, he was bound in honour to let the Dean know of the new phase

in the affair. But he did not find his father-in-law. The Dean returned to Brotherton on the following morning, and therefore knew nothing of this meeting till some days after it had taken place. The language which the Marquis had used to his brother when they were last together had been such as to render any friendly intercourse almost impossible. And then the mingled bitterness, frivolity, and wickedness of his brother, made every tone of the man's voice and every glance of his eye distasteful to Lord George. Lord George was always honest, was generally serious, and never malicious. There could be no greater contrast than that which had been produced between the brothers, either by difference of disposition from their birth, or by the varied circumstances of a residence on an Italian lake and one at Manor Cross. The Marquis thought his brother to be a fool, and did not scruple to say so on all occasions. Lord George felt that his brother was a knave, but would not have so called him on any consideration. The Marquis in sending for his brother hoped that even after all that had passed, he might make use of Lord George. Lord George in going to his brother, hoped that even after all that had passed he might be of use to the Marquis.

When he was shown into the sitting-room at the hotel, the Marchioness was again there. She, no doubt, had been tutored. She got up at once and shook hands with her brother-in-law, smiling graciously. It must have been a comfort to both of them that they spoke no common language, as they

could hardly have had many thoughts to interchange with each other.

"I wonder why the deuce you never learned Italian," said the Marquis.

"We never were taught," said Lord George.

"No; nobody in England ever is taught anything but Latin and Greek—with this singular result, that after ten or a dozen years of learning not one in twenty knows a word of either language. That is our English idea of education. In after life a little French may be picked up, from necessity; but it is French of the very worst kind. My wonder is that Englishmen can hold their own in the world at all."

"They do," said Lord George—to whom all this was ear-piercing blasphemy. The national conviction that an Englishman could thrash three foreigners, and if necessary eat them, was strong with him.

"Yes; there is a ludicrous strength even in their pig-headedness. But I always think that Frenchmen, Italians, and Prussians must, in dealing with us, be filled with infinite disgust. They must ever be saying, 'pig, pig, pig,' beneath their breath at every turn."

"They don't dare to say it out loud," said Lord George.

"They are too courteous, my dear fellow." Then he said a few words to his wife in Italian, upon which she left the room, again shaking hands with her brother-in-law, and again smiling.

Then the Marquis rushed at once into the

middle of his affairs. "Don't you think, George, that you are an infernal fool to quarrel with me?"

"You have quarrelled with me. I haven't quarrelled with you."

"Oh no; not at all! When you send lawyers' clerks all over Italy to try to prove my boy to be a bastard, that is not quarrelling with me! When you accuse my wife of bigamy that is not quarrelling with me! When you conspire to make my house in the country too hot to hold me that is not quarrelling with me!"

"How have I conspired? with whom have I conspired?"

"When I explained my wishes about the house at Cross Hall, why did you encourage those foolish old maids to run counter to me. You must have understood pretty well that it would not suit either of us to be near the other, and yet you chose to stick up for legal rights."

"We thought it better for my mother."

"My mother would have consented to anything that I proposed. Do you think I don't know how the land lies? Well; what have you learned in Italy?" Lord George was silent. "Of course I know. I'm not such a fool as not to keep my ears and eyes open. As far as your inquiries have gone yet, are you justified in calling Popenjoy a bastard?"

"I have never called him so—never! I have always declared my belief and my wishes to be in his favour."

"Then, why the d—— have you made all this rumpus?"

"Because it was necessary to be sure. When a man marries the same wife twice over——"

"Have you never heard of that being done before? Are you so ignorant as not to know that there are a hundred little reasons which may make that expedient? You have made your inquiries now, and what is the result?"

Lord George paused a moment before he replied, and then answered with absolute honesty. "It is all very odd to me. That may be my English prejudice. But I do think that your boy is legitimate."

"You are satisfied as to that?"

He paused again, meditating his reply. He did not wish to be untrue to the Dean, but then he was very anxious to be true to his brother. He remembered that in the Dean's presence he had told the lawyer that he would have nothing to do with further inquiries. He had asked for the lawyer's bill, thereby withdrawing from the investigation. "Yes," he said slowly; "I am satisfied."

"And you mean to do nothing further?"

Again he was very slow, remembering how necessary it would be that he should tell all this to the Dean, and how full of wrath the Dean would be. "No; I do not mean to do anything further."

"I may take that as your settled purpose?"

There was another pause, and then he spoke: "Yes, you may."

"Then, George, let us try and forget what has passed. It cannot pay for you and me to quarrel.

I shall not stay in England very long. I don't like it. It was necessary that the people about should know that I had a wife and son, and so I brought him and her to this comfortless country. I shall return before the winter, and for anything that I care you may all go back to Manor Cross."

"I don't think my mother would like that."

"Why shouldn't she like it? I suppose I was to be allowed to have my own house when I wanted it? I hope there was no offence in that, even to that dragon Sarah? At any rate, you may as well look after the property; and if they won't live there, you can. But there's one question I want to ask you."

"Well?"

"What do you think of your precious father-in-law; and what do you think that I must think of him? Will you not admit that for a vulgar, impudent brute, he is about as bad as even England can supply?" Of course Lord George had nothing to say in answer to this. "He is going on with this tomfoolery, I believe?"

"You mean the inquiry?"

"Yes; I mean the inquiry whether my son and your nephew is a bastard. I know he put you up to it. Am I right in saying that he has not abandoned it?"

"I think you are right."

"Then by heaven I'll ruin him. He may have a little money, but I don't think his purse is quite so long as mine. I'll lead him such a dance that he

shall wish he had never heard the name of Germain. I'll make his Deanery too hot to hold him. Now, George, as between you and me this shall be all passed over. That poor child is not strong, and after all you may probably be my heir. I shall never live in England, and you are welcome to the house. I can be very bitter, but I can forgive; and as far as you are concerned I do forgive. But I expect you to drop your precious father-in-law." Lord George was again silent. He could not say he would drop the Dean; but at this moment he was not sufficiently fond of the Dean to rise up in his stirrups and fight a battle for him. "You understand me," continued the Marquis; "I don't want any assurance from you. He is determined to prosecute an inquiry adverse to the honour of your family, and in opposition to your settled convictions. I don't think that after that you can doubt about your duty. Come and see me again before long, won't you?" Lord George said that he would come again before long, and then departed.

As he walked home his mind was sorely perplexed and divided. He had made up his mind to take no further share in the Popenjoy investigation, and must have been right to declare as much to his brother. His conscience was clear as to that. And then there were many reasons which induced him to feel coldly about the Dean. His own wife had threatened him with her father. And the Dean was always driving him. And he hated the Dean's money. He felt that the Dean was not quite all that a gentleman should be. But, nevertheless, it

behoved him above all things to be honest and straightforward with the Dean.

There had been something in his interview with his brother to please him, but it had not been all delightful.

CHAPTER XV.

Preparations for the Ball.

How was he to keep faith with the Dean? This was Lord George's first trouble after his reconciliation with his brother. The Dean was back at the Deanery, and Lord George mistrusted his own power of writing such a letter as would be satisfactory on so obtuse a matter. He knew that he should fail in making a good story, even face-to-face, and that his letter would be worse than spoken words. In intellect he was much inferior to the Dean, and was only too conscious of his own inferiority. In this condition of mind he told his story to his wife. She had never even seen the Marquis, and had never quite believed in those ogre qualities which had caused so many groans to Lady Sarah and Lady Susanna. When, therefore, her husband told her that he had made his peace with his brother, she was inclined to rejoice. "And Popenjoy is Popenjoy," she said, smiling.

"I believe he is, with all my heart."

"And that is to be an end of it, George? You know that I have never been eager for any grandeur."

"I know it. You have behaved beautifully all along."

"Oh, I won't boast. Perhaps I ought to have

been more ambitious for you. But I hate quarrels, and I shouldn't like to have claimed anything which did not really belong to us. It is all over now."

"I can't answer for your father."

"But you and papa are all one."

"Your father is very steadfast. He does not know yet that I have seen my brother. I think you might write to him. He ought to know what has taken place. Perhaps he would come up again if he heard that I had been with my brother."

"Shall I ask him to come here?"

"Certainly. Why should he not come here? There is his room. He can always come if he pleases."

So the matter was left, and Mary wrote her letter. It was not very lucid—but it could hardly have been lucid, the writer knowing so few of the details. "George has become friends with his brother," she said, "and wishes me to tell you. He says that Popenjoy is Popenjoy, and I am very glad. It was such a trouble. George thinks you will come up to town when you hear, and begs you will come here. Do come, papa! It makes me quite wretched when you go to that horrid hotel. There is such a lot of quarrelling, and it almost seems as if you were going to quarrel with us when you don't come here. Pray, papa, never, never do that. If I thought you and George weren't friends it would break my heart. Your room is always ready for you, and if you'll say what day you'll be here I will get a few people to meet you." The letter was much more

occupied with her desire to see her father than with that momentous question on which her father was so zealously intent. Popenjoy is Popenjoy! It was very easy to assert so much. Lord George would no doubt give way readily, because he disliked the trouble of the contest. But it was not so with the Dean. "He is no more Popenjoy than I am Popenjoy," said the Dean to himself when he read the letter. Yes; he must go up to town again. He must know what had really taken place between the two brothers. That was essential, and he did not doubt but that he should get the exact truth from Lord George. But he would not go to Munster Court. There was already a difference of opinion between him and his son-in-law sufficient to make such a sojourn disagreeable. If not disagreeable to himself, he knew that it would be so to Lord George. He was sorry to vex Mary, but Mary's interests were more at his heart than her happiness. It was now the business of his life to make her a Marchioness, and that business he would follow whether he made himself, her, and others happy or unhappy. He wrote to her, bidding her tell her husband that he would again be in London on a day which he named, but adding that for the present he would prefer going to the hotel. "I cannot help it," said Lord George, moodily. "I have done all I could to make him welcome here. If he chooses to stand off and be stiff, he must do so."

At this time Lord George had many things to vex him. Every day he received at his club a letter from Mrs. Houghton, and each letter was a

little dagger. He was abused by every epithet, every innuendo, and every accusation familiar to the tongues and pens of the irritated female mind. A stranger reading them would have imagined that he had used all the arts of a Lothario to entrap the unguarded affections of the writer, and then, when successful, had first neglected the lady and afterwards betrayed her. And with every stab so given there was a command expressed that he should come instantly to Berkeley Square in order that he might receive other and worse gashes at the better convenience of the assailant. But as Mrs. Bond's ducks would certainly not have come out of the pond had they fully understood the nature of that lady's invitation, so neither did Lord George go to Berkeley Square in obedience to these commands. Then there came a letter which to him was no longer a little dagger, but a great sword—a sword making a wound so wide that his life-blood seemed to flow. There was no accusation of betrayal in this letter. It was simply the broken-hearted wailings of a woman whose love was too strong for her. Had he not taught her to regard him as the only man in the world whose presence was worth having? Had he not so wound himself into every recess of her heart as to make life without seeing him insupportable? Could it be possible that, after having done all this, he had no regard for her? Was he so hard, so cruel, such adamant as to deny her at least a farewell? As for herself, she was now beyond all fear of consequences. She was ready to die if it were necessary—ready to lose all

the luxuries of her husband's position rather than never see him again. She had a heart! She was inclined to doubt whether any one among her acquaintances was so burdened. Why, oh why, had she thought so steadfastly of his material interests when he used to kneel at her feet and ask her to be his bride, before he had ever seen Mary Lovelace? Then this long epistle was brought to an end. "Come to me to-morrow, A. H. Destroy this the moment you have read it." The last behest he did obey. He would put no second letter from this woman in his wife's way. He tore the paper into minute fragments, and deposited the portions in different places. That was easily done; but what should be done as to the other behest? If he went to Berkeley Square again, would he be able to leave it triumphantly as he had done on his last visit? That he did not wish to see her for his own sake he was quite certain. But he thought it incumbent on him to go yet once again. He did not altogether believe all that story as to her tortured heart. Looking back at what had passed between them since he had first thought himself to be in love with her, he could not remember such a depth of love-making on his part as that which she described. In the ordinary way he had proposed to her, and had, in the ordinary way, been rejected. Since that, and since his marriage, surely the protestations of affection had come almost exclusively from the lady! He thought that it was so, and yet was hardly sure. If he had got such a hold on her affections as she described, certainly then he owed to her some re-

paration. But as he remembered her great head of false hair and her paint, and called to mind his wife's description of her, he almost protested to himself that she was deceiving him—he almost read her rightly. Nevertheless, he would go once more. He would go and tell her sternly that the thing must come to an end, and that no more letters were to be written.

He did go, and found Jack De Baron there, and heard Jack discourse enthusiastically about Mrs. Montacute Jones's ball, which was to be celebrated in two or three days from the present time. Then Mrs. Houghton was very careful to ask some question in Lord George's presence as to some special figure-dance which was being got up for the occasion. It was a dance newly introduced from Moldavia, and was the most ravishing thing in the way of dancing that had ever yet found its way into this country. Nobody had yet seen it, and it was being kept a profound secret—to be displayed only at Mrs. Montacute Jones's party. It was practised in secret in her back drawing-room by the eight performers, with the assistance of a couple of most trustworthy hired musicians, whom that liberal old lady, Mrs. Montacute Jones, supplied—so that the rehearsals might make the performers perfect for the grand night. This was the story as told with great interest by Mrs. Houghton, who seemed for the occasion almost to have recovered from her heart complaint. That, however, was necessarily kept in abeyance during Jack's presence. Jack, though he had been enthusiastic about Mrs. Jones and her ball before Lord

George's arrival, and though he had continued to talk freely up to a certain point, suddenly became reticent as to the great Moldavian dance. But Mrs. Houghton would not be reticent. She declared the four couples who had been selected as performers to be the happy fortunate ones of the season. Mrs. Montacute Jones was a nasty old woman for not having asked her. Of course there was a difficulty, but there might have been two sets. "And Jack is such a false loon," she said to Lord George, "that he won't show me one of the figures."

"Are you going to dance it?" asked Lord George.

"I fancy I'm to be one of the team."

"He is to dance with Mary," said Mrs. Houghton. Then Lord George thought that he understood the young man's reticence, and he was once again very wretched. There came that cloud upon his brow which never sat there without being visible to all who were in the company. No man told the tale of his own feelings so plainly as he did. And Mrs. Houghton, though declaring herself to be ignorant of the figure, had described the dance as a farrago of polkas, waltzes, and galops, so that the thing might be supposed to be a fast rapturous whirl from the beginning to the end. And his wife was going through this indecent exhibition at Mrs. Montacute Jones's ball with Captain De Baron after all that he had said!

"You are quite wrong in your ideas about the dance," said Jack to his cousin. "It is the quietest thing out—almost as grave as a minuet. It's very

pretty, but people here will find it too slow." It may be doubted whether he did much good by this explanation. Lord George thought that he was lying, though he had almost thought before that Mrs. Houghton was lying on the other side. But it was true at any rate that, after all that had passed, a special arrangement had been made for his wife to dance with Jack De Baron. And then his wife had been called by implication, "One of the team."

Jack got up to go, but before he left the room Aunt Ju was there, and then that sinful old woman Mrs. Montacute Jones herself. "My dear," she said, in answer to a question from Mrs. Houghton about the dance, "I am not going to tell anybody anything about it. I don't know why it should have been talked of. Four couple of good-looking young people are going to amuse themselves, and I have no doubt that those who look on will be very much gratified." Oh, that his wife, that Lady Mary Germain, should be talked of as one of "four couple of good-looking young people," and that she should be about to dance with Jack De Baron, in order that strangers might be gratified by looking at her!

It was manifest that nothing special could be said to Mrs. Houghton on that occasion, as one person came after another. She looked all the while perfectly disengaged. Nobody could have imagined that she was in the presence of the man whose love was all the world to her. When he got up to take his leave, she parted from him as though he were no more to her than he ought to have been. And indeed he too had for the time been freed

from the flurry of his affair with Mrs. Houghton, by the other flurry occasioned by the Moldavian dance. The new dance was called, he had been told, the Kappa-kappa. There was something in the name suggestive of another dance of which he had heard—and he was very unhappy.

He found the Dean in Munster Court when he reached his own house. The first word that his wife spoke to him was about the ball. "George, papa is going with me on Friday to Mrs. Montacute Jones's."

"I hope he will like it," said Lord George.

"I wish you would come."

"Why should I go? I have already said that I would not."

"As for the invitation, that does not signify in the least. Do come just about twelve o'clock. We've got up such a dance, and I should like you to come and see it."

"Who is we?"

"Well—the parties are not quite arranged yet. I think I'm to dance with Count Costi. Something depends on colours of dress and other matters. The gentlemen are all to be in some kind of uniform. We have rehearsed it, and in rehearsing we have done it all round, one with the other."

"Why didn't you tell me before?"

"We weren't to tell till it was settled."

"I mean to go and see it," said the Dean. "I delight in anything of that kind."

Mary was so perfectly easy in the matter, so free from doubt, so disembarrassed, that he was for the

moment tranquillised. She had said that she was to dance, not with that pernicious Captain, but with a foreign count. He did not like foreign counts, but at the present moment he preferred anyone to Jack De Baron. He did not for a moment doubt her truth. And she had been true—though Jack De Baron and Mrs. Houghton had been true also. When Mary had been last at Mrs. Jones's house the matter had not been quite settled, and in her absence Jack had foolishly, if not wrongly, carried his point with the old lady. It had been decided that the performers were to go through their work in the fashion that might best achieve the desired effect—that they were not to dance exactly with whom they pleased, but were to have their parts assigned them as actors on a stage. Jack no doubt had been led by his own private wishes in securing Mary as his partner, but of that contrivance on his part she had been ignorant when she gave her programme of the affair to her husband. "Won't you come in and see it?" she said again.

"I am not very fond of those things. Perhaps I may come in for a few minutes."

"I am fond of them," said the Dean. "I think any innocent thing that makes life joyous and pretty is good."

"That is rather begging the question," said Lord George as he left the room.

Mary had not known what her husband meant by begging the question, but the Dean had of course understood him. "I hope he is not going to become

ascetic," he said. "I hope at least that he will not insist that you should be so."

"It is not his nature to be very gay," she answered.

On the next day, in the morning, was the last rehearsal, and then Mary learned what was her destiny. She regretted it, but could not remonstrate. Jack's uniform was red. The Count's dress was blue and gold. Her dress was white, and she was told that the white and red must go together. There was nothing more to be said. She could not plead that her husband was afraid of Jack De Baron. Nor certainly would she admit to herself that she was in the least afraid of him herself. But for her husband's foolish jealousy, she would infinitely have preferred the arrangement as now made—just as a little girl prefers as a playmate a handsome boy whom she has long known, to some ill-vised stranger with whom she has never quarrelled and never again made friends. But when she saw her husband, she found herself unable to tell him of the change which had been made. She was not actor enough to be able to mention Jack De Baron's name to him with tranquillity.

On the next morning—the morning of the important day—she heard casually from Mrs. Jones that Lord George had been at Mrs. Houghton's house. She had quite understood from her husband that he intended to see that evil woman again after the discovery and reading of the letter. He had himself told her that he intended it; and she, if she had not actually assented, had made no

protest against his doing so. But that visit, represented as being one final necessary visit, had, she was well aware, been made some time since. She had not asked him what had taken place. She had been unwilling to show any doubt by such a question. The evil woman's name had never been on her tongue since the day on which the letter had been read. But now, when she heard that he was there again, so soon, as a friend joining in general conversation in the evil woman's house, the matter did touch her. Could it be that he was deceiving her after all, and that he loved the woman? Did he really like that helmet, that paint, and that affected laugh? And had he lied to her—deceived her with a premeditated story which must have been full of lies? She could hardly bring herself to believe this; and yet, why, why, why should he be there? The visit of which he had spoken had been one intended to put an end to all close friendship—one in which he was to tell the woman that though the scandal of an outward quarrel might be avoided, he and she were to meet no more. And yet he was there. For aught she knew, he might be there every day! She did know that Mrs. Montacute Jones had found him there. Then he could come home to her and talk of the impropriety of dancing! He could do such things as this, and yet be angry with her because she liked the society of Captain De Baron!

Certainly she would dance with Captain De Baron. Let him come and see her dancing with him; and then, if he dared to upbraid her, she

would ask him why he continued his intimacy in Berkeley Square. In her anger she almost began to think that a quarrel was necessary. Was it not manifest that he was deceiving her about that woman? The more she thought of it the more wretched she became; but on that day she said nothing of it to him. They dined together, the Dean dining with them. He was perturbed and gloomy, the Dean having assured them that he did not mean to allow the Popenjoy question to rest. "I stand in no awe of your brother," the Dean had said to him. This had angered Lord George, and he had refused to discuss the matter any further.

At nine Lady George went up to dress, and at half-past ten she started with her father. At that time her husband had left the house and had said not a word further as to his intention of going to Mrs. Jones's house. "Do you think he will come?" she said to the Dean.

"Upon my word I don't know. He seems to me to be in an ill-humour with all the world."

"Don't quarrel with him, papa."

"I do not mean to do so. I never mean to quarrel with anyone, and least of all with him. But I must do what I conceive to be my duty whether he likes it or not."

CHAPTER XVI.

The Kappa-kappa.

MRS. MONTACUTE JONES'S house in Grosvenor Place was very large and very gorgeous. On this occasion it was very gorgeous indeed. The party had grown in dimensions. The new Moldavian dance had become the topic of general discourse. Everybody wanted to see the Kappa-kappa. Count Costi, Lord Giblet, young Sir Harry Tripletoe, and, no doubt, Jack De Baron also, had talked a good deal about it at the clubs. It had been intended to be a secret, and the ladies, probably, had been more reticent. Lady Florence Fitzflorence had just mentioned it to her nineteen specially intimate friends. Madame Gigi, the young wife of the old Bohemian minister, had spoken of it only to the diplomatic set; Miss Patmore Green had been as silent as death, except in her own rather large family, and Lady George had hardly told anybody, except her father. But, nevertheless, the secret had escaped, and great efforts had been made to secure invitations. "I can get you to the Duchess of Albury's in July if you can manage it for me," one young lady said to Jack de Baron.

"Utterly impossible!" said Jack, to whom the

offered bribe was not especially attractive. "There won't be standing room in the cellars. I went down on my knees to Mrs. Montacute Jones for a very old friend, and she simply asked me whether I was mad." This was, of course, romance; but, nevertheless, the crowd was great, and the anxiety to see the Kappa-kappa universal.

By eleven the dancing had commenced. Everything had been arranged in the strictest manner. Whatever dance might be going on was to be brought to a summary close at twelve o'clock, and then the Kappa-kappa was to be commenced. It had been found that the dance occupied exactly forty minutes. When it was over the doors of the banqueting hall would be opened. The Kappa-kappaites would then march in to supper, and the world at large would follow them.

Lady George, when she first entered the room, found a seat near the hostess, and sat herself down, meaning to wait for the important moment. She was a little flurried as she thought of various things. There was the evil woman before her, already dancing. The evil woman had nodded at her, and had then quickly turned away, determined not to see that her greeting was rejected; and there was Augusta Mildmay absolutely dancing with Jack De Baron, and looking as though she enjoyed the fun. But to Mary there was something terrible in it all. She had been so desirous to be happy—to be gay—to amuse herself, and yet to be innocent. Her father's somewhat epicurean doctrines had filled her

mind completely. And what had hitherto come of it? Her husband mistrusted her; and she at this moment certainly mistrusted him most grievously. Could she fail to mistrust him? And she, absolutely conscious of purity, had been so grievously suspected! As she looked round on the dresses and diamonds, and heard the thick hum of voices, and saw on all sides the pretence of cordiality—as she watched the altogether unhidden flirtations of one girl, and the despondent frown of another—she began to ask herself whether her father had not been wrong when he insisted that she should be taken to London. Would she not have been more safe and therefore more happy even down at Cross Hall, with her two virtuous sisters-in-law? What would become of her should she quarrel with her husband, and how should she not quarrel with him if he would suspect her, and would frequent the house of that evil woman?

Then Jack De Baron came up to her, talking to her father. The Dean liked the young man, who had always something to say for himself, whose manners were lively, and who, to tell the truth, was more than ordinarily civil to Lady George's father. Whether Jack would have put himself out of the way to describe the Kappa-kappa to any other dignitary of the Church may be doubted, but he had explained it all very graciously to the Dean. "So it seems that, after all, you are to dance with Captain De Baron," said the Dean.

"Yes; isn't it hard upon me? I was to have

stood up with a real French Count, who has real diamond buttons, and now I am to be put off with a mere British Captain, because my white frock is supposed to suit his red coat!"

"And who has the Count?"

"That odiously fortunate Lady Florence—and she has diamonds of her own! I think they should have divided the diamonds. Madame Gigi has the Lord. Between ourselves, papa" and as she said this she whispered, and both her father and Jack bent over to hear her—"we are afraid of our Lord; ain't we, Captain De Baron? There has been ever so much to manage, as we none of us quite wanted the Lord. Madame Gigi talks very little English, so we were able to put him off upon her."

"And does the Lord talk French?"

"That doesn't signify, as Giblet never talks at all," said Jack.

"Why did you have him?"

"To tell you the truth, among us all there is rather a hope that he will propose to Miss Patmore Green. Dear Mrs. Montacute Jones is very clever at these things, and saw at a glance that nothing would be so likely to make him do it as seeing Madeline Green dancing with Tripletoe. No fellow ever did dance so well as Tripletoe, or looked half so languishing. You see, Dean, there are a good many ins and outs in these matters, and they have to be approached carefully." The Dean was amused, and his daughter would have been happy, but for the double care which sat heavy at her heart. Then

Jack suggested to her that she might as well stand up for a square dance. All the other Kappa-kappaites had danced or were dancing. The one thing on which she was firmly determined was that she would not be afraid of Captain De Baron. Whatever she did now she did immediately under her father's eye. She made no reply, but got up and put her hand on the Captain's arm without spoken assent, as a woman will do when she is intimate with a man.

"Upon my word, for a very young creature, I never saw such impudence as that woman's," said a certain Miss Punter to Augusta Mildmay. Miss Punter was a great friend of Augusta Mildmay, and was watching her friend's broken heart with intense interest.

"It is disgusting," said Augusta.

"She doesn't seem to mind the least who sees it. She must mean to leave Lord George altogether, or she would never go on like that. De Baron wouldn't be such a fool as to go off with her?"

"Men are fools enough for anything," said the broken-hearted one. While this was going on Mary danced her square dance complaisantly; and her proud father, looking on, thought that she was by far the prettiest woman in the room.

Before the quadrille was over a gong was struck, and the music stopped suddenly. It was twelve o'clock, and the Kappa-kappa was to be danced. It is hard in most amusements to compel men and

women into disagreeable punctuality; but the stopping of music will bring a dance to a sudden end. There were some who grumbled, and one or two declared that they would not even stay to look at the Kappa-kappa. But Mrs. Montacute Jones was a great autocrat; and in five minutes' time the four couples were arranged, with ample space, in spite of the pressing crowd.

It must be acknowledged that Jack De Baron had given no correct idea of the dance when he said that it was like a minuet; but it must be remembered also that Lady George had not been a party to that deceit. The figure was certainly a lively figure. There was much waltzing to quick time, the glory of which seemed to consist in going backwards, and in the interweaving of the couples without striking each other, as is done in skating. They were all very perfect, except poor Lord Giblet, who once or twice nearly fell into trouble. During the performance they all changed partners more than once, but each lady came back to her own after very short intervals. All those who were not envious declared it to be very pretty, and prophesied great future success for the Kappa-kappa. Those who were very wise and very discreet hinted that it might become a romp when danced without all the preparation which had been given to it on the present occasion. It certainly became faster as it progressed, and it was evident that considerable skill and considerable physical power were necessary for its completion. "It would be a deal too stagey for my girls," said Mrs. Conway Smith, whose "girls"

had, during the last ten years, gone through every phase of flirtation invented in these latter times. Perhaps it did savour a little too much of ballet practice; perhaps it was true that with less care there might have been inconveniences. Faster it grew and faster; but still they had all done it before, and done it with absolute accuracy. It was now near the end. Each lady had waltzed a turn with each gentleman. Lady George had been passed on from the Count to Sir Harry, and from Sir Harry to Lord Giblet. After her turn it was his Lordship's duty to deliver her up to her partner, with whom she would make a final turn round the dancing-space; and then the Kappa-kappa would have been danced. But alas! as Lord Giblet was doing this he lost his head and came against the Count and Madame Gigi. Lady George was almost thrown to the ground, but was caught by the Captain, who had just parted with Lady Florence to Sir Harry. But poor Mary had been almost on the floor, and could hardly have been saved without something approaching to the violence of an embrace.

Lord George had come into the room very shortly after the Kappa-kappa had been commenced, but had not at once been able to get near the dancers. Gradually he worked his way through the throng, and when he first saw the performers could not tell who was his wife's partner. She was then waltzing backwards with Count Costi; and he, though he hated waltzing, and considered the sin to be greatly aggravated by the backward movement, and though he hated counts, was still somewhat pacified. He

had heard since he was in the room how the partners were arranged, and had thought that his wife had deceived him. The first glance was reassuring. But Mary soon returned to her real partner; and he slowly ascertained that she was in very truth waltzing with Captain De Baron. He stood there, a little behind the first row of spectators, never for a moment seen by his wife, but able himself to see everything, with a brow becoming every moment blacker and blacker. To him the exhibition was in every respect objectionable. The brightness of the apparel of the dancers was in itself offensive to him. The approach that had been made to the garishness of a theatrical performance made the whole thing, in his eyes, unfit for modest society. But that his wife should be one of the performers, that she should be gazed at by a crowd as she tripped about, and that, after all that had been said, she should be tripping in the arms of Captain De Baron, was almost more than he could endure. Close to him, but a little behind, stood the Dean, thoroughly enjoying all that he saw. It was to him a delight that there should be such a dance to be seen in a lady's drawing-room, and that he should be there to see it. It was to him an additional delight that his daughter should have been selected as one of the dancers. These people were all persons of rank and fashion, and his girl was among them quite as their equal—his girl who some day should be Marchioness of Brotherton. And it gratified him thoroughly to think that she enjoyed it—that she did it well—that she could dance so that standers-by took pleasure in seeing

her dancing. His mind in the matter was altogether antagonistic to that of his son-in-law.

Then came the little accident. The Dean, with a momentary impulse, put up his hand, and then smiled well-pleased when he saw how well the matter had been rectified by the Captain's activity. But it was not so with Lord George. He pressed forward into the circle with so determined a movement that nothing could arrest him till he had his wife by the arm. Everybody, of course, was staring at him. The dancers were astounded. Mary apparently thought less of it than the others, for she spoke to him with a smile. "It is all right, George; I was not in the least hurt."

"It is disgraceful!" said he in a loud voice; "come away."

"Oh yes," she said; "I think we had finished. It was nobody's fault."

"Come away; I will have no more of this."

"Is there anything wrong?" asked the Dean with an air of innocent surprise.

The offended husband was almost beside himself with passion. Though he knew that he was surrounded by those who would mock him he could not restrain himself. Though he was conscious at the moment that it was his special duty to shield his wife, he could not restrain his feelings. The outrage was too much for him. "There is very much the matter," he said aloud; "let her come away with me." Then he took her under his arm and attempted to lead her away to the door.

Mrs. Montacute Jones had, of course, seen it all, and was soon with him. "Pray do not take her away, Lord George," she said.

"Madam, I must be allowed to do so," he replied, still pressing on. "I would prefer to do so."

"Wait till her carriage is here."

"We will wait below. Good-night, good-night." And so he went out of the room with his wife on his arm, followed by the Dean. Since she had perceived that he was angry with her, and that he had displayed his anger in public, Mary had not spoken a word. She had pressed him to come and see the dance, not without a purpose in her mind. She meant to get rid of the thraldom to which he had subjected her when desiring her not to waltz, and had done so in part when she obtained his direct sanction at Lady Brabazon's. No doubt she had felt that as he took liberties as to his own life, as he received love-letters from an odious woman, he was less entitled to unqualified obedience than he might have been had his hands been perfectly clean. There had been a little spirit of rebellion engendered in her by his misconduct; but she had determined to do nothing in secret. She had asked his leave to waltz at Lady Brabazon's, and had herself persuaded him to come to Mrs. Montacute Jones's. Perhaps she would hardly have dared to do so had she known that Captain De Baron was to be her partner. While dancing she had been unaware of her husband's presence, and had not thought of him. When he had first come to her she had in

truth imagined that he had been frightened by her narrow escape from falling. But when he bade her come away with that frown on his face, and with that awful voice, then she knew it all. She had no alternative but to take his arm, and to "come away." She had not courage enough—I had better perhaps say impudence enough—to pretend to speak to him or to anyone near him with ease. All eyes were upon her, and she felt them; all tongues would be talking of her, and she already heard the ill-natured words. Her own husband had brought all this upon her—her own husband, whose love-letter from another woman she had so lately seen, and so readily forgiven! It was her own husband who had so cruelly, so causelessly, subjected her to shame in public, which could never be washed out or forgotten! And who would sympathise with her? There was no one now but her father. He would stand by her; he would be good to her; but her husband by his own doing had wilfully disgraced her.

Not a word was spoken till they were in the cloak-room, and then Lord George stalked out to find the brougham, or any cab that might take them away from the house. Then for the first time the Dean whispered a word to her. "Say as little as you can to him to-night, but keep up your courage."

"Oh papa!"

"I understand it all. I will be with you immediately after breakfast."

"You will not leave me here alone?"

"Certainly not, nor till you are in your carriage.

But listen to what I am telling you. Say as little as you can till I am with you. Tell him that you are unwell to-night, and that you must sleep before you talk to him."

"Ah! you don't know, papa."

"I know that I will have the thing put on a right footing." Then Lord George came back, having found a cab. He gave his arm to his wife and took her away, without saying a word to the Dean. At the door of the cab the Dean bade them both good-night. "God bless you, my child," he said.

"Good-night; you'll come to-morrow?"

"Certainly." Then the door was shut, and the husband and wife were driven away.

Of course this little episode contributed much to the amusement of Mrs. Montacute Jones's guests. The Kappa-kappa had been a very pretty exhibition, but it had not been nearly so exciting as that of the jealous husband. Captain De Baron, who remained, was, of course, a hero. As he could not take his partner in to supper, he was honoured by the hand of Mrs. Montacute Jones herself. "I wouldn't have had that happen for a thousand pounds," said the old lady.

"Nor I for ten," said Jack.

"Has there been any reason for it?"

"None in the least. I can't explain of what nature is my intimacy with Lady George, but it has been more like that of children than grown people."

"I know. When grown people play at being children, it is apt to be dangerous."

"But we had no idea of the kind. I may be wicked enough. I say nothing about that. But she is as pure as snow. Mrs. Jones, I could no more dare to press her hand than I would to fly at the sun. Of course I like her."

"And she likes you."

"I hope so—in that sort of way. But it is shocking that such a scene should come from such a cause."

"Some men, Captain De Baron, don't like having their young wives liked by handsome young officers. It's very absurd, I grant."

Mrs. Jones and Captain De Baron did really grieve at what had been done, but to others, the tragedy coming after the comedy had not been painful. "What will be the end of it?" said Miss Patmore Green to Sir Harry.

"I am afraid they won't let her dance it any more," said Sir Harry, who was intent solely on the glories of the Kappa-kappa. "We shall hardly get anyone to do it so well."

"There'll be something worse than that, I'm afraid," said Miss Green.

Count Costi suggested to Lady Florence that there would certainly be a duel. "We never fight here in England, Count."

"Ah! dat is bad. A gentleman come and make himself vera disagreeable. If he most fight perhaps he would hold his tong. I tink we do things better in Paris and Vienna." Lord Giblet volunteered his opinion to Madame Gigi that it was very disgrace-

ful. Madame Gigi simply shrugged her shoulders, and opened her eyes. She could congratulate herself on being able to manage her own husband better than that.

CHAPTER XVII.

Rebellion.

LADY GEORGE never forgot that slow journey home in the cab, for in truth it was very slow. It seemed to her that she would never reach her own house. "Mary," he said, as soon as they were seated, "you have made me a miserable man." The cab rumbled and growled frightfully, and he felt himself unable to attack her with dignity while they were progressing. "But I will postpone what I have to say till we have reached home."

"I have done nothing wrong," said Mary, very stoutly.

"You had better say nothing more till we are at home." After that not a word more was said, but the journey was very long.

At the door of the house Lord George gave his hand to help her out of the cab, and then marched before her through the passage into the dining-room. It was evident that he was determined to make his harangue on that night. But she was the first to speak. "George," she said, "I have suffered very much, and am very tired. If you please, I will go to bed."

"You have disgraced me," he said.

"No; it is you that have disgraced me and put me to shame before everybody—for nothing, for

nothing. I have done nothing of which I am ashamed." She looked up into his face, and he could see that she was full of passion, and by no means in a mood to submit to his reproaches. She, too, could frown, and was frowning now. Her nostrils were dilated, and her eyes were bright with anger. He could see how it was with her; and though he was determined to be master, he hardly knew how he was to make good his masterdom.

"You had better listen to me," he said.

"Not to-night. I am too ill, too thoroughly wretched. Anything you have got to say of course I will listen to—but not now." Then she walked to the door.

"Mary!" She paused with her hand on the lock. "I trust that you do not wish to contest the authority which I have over you?"

"I do not know; I cannot say. If your authority calls upon me to own that I have done anything wrong, I shall certainly contest it. And if I have not, I think—I think you will express your sorrow for the injury you have done me to-night." Then she left the room before he had made up his mind how he would continue his address. He was quite sure that he was right. Had he not desired her not to waltz? At that moment he quite forgot the casual permission he had barely given at Lady Brabazon's, and which had been intended to apply to that night only. Had he not specially warned her against this Captain De Baron, and told her that his name and hers were suffering from her intimacy with the man? And then, had she not deceived him directly by

naming another person as her partner in that odious dance? The very fact that she had so deceived him was proof to him that she had known that she ought not to dance with Captain De Baron, and that she had a vicious pleasure in doing so, which she had been determined to gratify even in opposition to his express orders. As he stalked up and down the room in his wrath, he forgot as much as he remembered. It had been represented to him that this odious romp had been no more than a minuet; but he did not bear in mind that his wife had been no party to that misrepresentation. And he forgot, too, that he himself had been present as a spectator at her express request. And when his wrath was at the fullest he almost forgot those letters from Adelaide Houghton! But he did not forget that all Mrs. Montacute Jones's world had seen him as, in his offended marital majesty, he took his wife out from amidst the crowd, declaring his indignation and his jealousy to all who were there assembled. He might have been wrong there. As he thought of it all he confessed to himself as much as that. But the injury done had been done to himself rather than to her. Of course they must leave London now, and leave it forever. She must go with him whither he might choose to take her. Perhaps Manor Cross might serve for their lives' seclusion, as the Marquis would not live there. But Manor Cross was near the Deanery, and he must sever his wife from her father. He was now very hostile to the Dean, who had looked on and seen his abasement, and had smiled. But, through it all, there never came to him

for a moment any idea of a permanent quarrel with his wife. It might, he thought, be long before there was permanent comfort between them. Obedience, absolute obedience, must come before that could be reached. But of the bond which bound them together he was far too sensible to dream of separation. Nor, in his heart, did he think her guilty of anything but foolish, headstrong indiscretion—of that, and latterly of dissimulation. It was not that Cæsar had been wronged, but that his wife had enabled idle tongues to suggest a wrong to Cæsar.

He did not see her again that night, betaking himself at a very late hour to his own dressing-room. On the next morning at an early hour he was awake thinking. He must not allow her to suppose for a moment that he was afraid of her. He went into her room a few minutes before their usual breakfast hour, and found her, nearly dressed, with her maid. "I shall be down directly, George," she said in her usual voice. As he could not bid the woman go away, he descended and waited for her in the parlour. When she entered the room she instantly rang the bell and contrived to keep the man in the room while she was making the tea. But he would not sit down. How is a man to scold his wife properly with toast and butter on a plate before him? "Will you not have your tea?" she asked—oh, so gently.

"Put it down," he said. According to her custom, she got up and brought it round to his place. When they were alone she would kiss his forehead as she did so; but now the servant was just closing the door, and there was no kiss.

"Do come to your breakfast, George," she said.

"I cannot eat my breakfast while all this is on my mind. I must speak of it. We must leave London at once.

"In a week or two."

"At once. After last night, there must be no more going to parties." She lifted her cup to her lips and sat quite silent. She would hear a little more before she answered him. "You must feel yourself that for some time to come, perhaps for some years, privacy will be the best for us."

"I feel nothing of the kind, George."

"Could you go and face those people after what happened last night?"

"Certainly I could, and should think it my duty to do so to-night, if it were possible. No doubt you have made it difficult, but I would do it."

"I was forced to make it difficult. There was nothing for me to do but to take you away."

"Because you were angry, you were satisfied to disgrace me before all the people there. What has been done cannot be helped. I must bear it. I cannot stop people from talking and thinking evil. But I will never say that I think evil of myself by hiding myself. I don't know what you mean by privacy. I want no privacy."

"Why did you dance with that man?"

"Because it was so arranged."

"You had told me it was someone else?"

"Do you mean to accuse me of a falsehood, George? First one arrangement had been made, and then another."

"I had been told before how it was to be."

"Who told you? I can only answer for myself."

"And why did you waltz?"

"Because you had withdrawn your foolish objection. Why should I not dance like other people? Papa does not think it wrong?"

"Your father has nothing to do with it."

"If you ill-treat me, George, papa must have something to do with it. Do you think he will see me disgraced before a room full of people, as you did yesterday, and hold his tongue! Of course you are my husband, but he is still my father; and if I want protection, he will protect me."

"I will protect you," said Lord George, stamping his foot upon the floor.

"Yes; by burying me somewhere. That is what you say you mean to do. And why? Because you get some silly nonsense into your head, and then make yourself and me ridiculous in public. If you think I am what you seem to suspect, you had better let papa have me back again—though that is so horrible that I can hardly bring myself to think of it. If you do not think so, surely you should beg my pardon for the affront you put on me last night."

This was a way in which he had certainly not looked at the matter. Beg her pardon! He, as a husband, beg a wife's pardon under any circumstances! And beg her pardon for having carried her away from a house in which she had manifestly disobeyed him. No, indeed. But then he was quite as strongly opposed to that other idea of sending her back to her father, as a man might send a wife

who had disgraced herself. Anything would be better than that. If she would only acknowledge that she had been indiscreet, they would go down together into Brothershire, and all might be comfortable. Though she was angry with him, obstinate and rebellious, yet his heart was softened to her, because she did not throw the woman's love-letter in his teeth. He had felt that here would be his great difficulty, but his difficulty now arose rather from the generosity which kept her silent on the subject. "What I did," he said, "I did to protect you."

"Such protection was an insult." Then she left the room before he had tasted his tea or his toast. She had heard her father's knock, and knew that she would find him in the drawing-room. She had made up her mind how she would tell the story to him; but when she was with him he would have no story told at all. He declared that he knew everything, and spoke as though there could be no doubt as to the heinousness, or rather, absurdity, of Lord George's conduct. "It is very sad—very sad, indeed," he said; "one hardly knows what one ought to do."

"He wants to go down—to Cross Hall."

"That is out of the question. You must stay out your time here and then come to me, as you arranged. He must get out of it by saying that he was frightened by thinking that you had fallen."

"It was not that, papa."

"Of course it was not; but how else is he to escape from his own folly?"

"You do not think that I have been—wrong—with Captain De Baron?"

"I! God bless you, my child. I think that you have been wrong! He cannot think so either. Has he accused you?"

Then she told him, as nearly as she could, all that had passed between them, including the expression of his desire that she should not waltz, and his subsequent permission given at Lady Brabazon's. "Pish!" he ejaculated. "I hate these attempted restrictions. It is like a woman telling her husband not to smoke. What a fool a man must be not to see that he is preparing misery for himself, by laying embargoes on the recreations of his nearest companion!" Then he spoke of what he himself would do. "I must see him, and if he will not hear reason, you must go with me to the Deanery without him."

"Don't separate us, papa."

"God forbid that there should be any permanent separation. If he be obstinate, it may be well that you should be away from him for a week or two. Why can't a man wash his dirty linen at home, if he has any to wash. His, at any rate, did not come to him with you."

Then there was a very stormy scene in the dining-room between the two men. The Dean, whose words were infinitely more ready and available than those of his opponent, said very much the most, and by the fierce indignation of his disclaimers, almost prevented the husband from dwelling on the wife's indiscretion. "I did not think it possible that such a man as you could have behaved so cruelly to such a girl."

“I was not cruel; I acted for the best.”

“You degraded yourself, and her too.”

“I degraded no one,” said Lord George.

“It is hard to think what may now best be done to cure the wound which she has been made to suffer. I must insist on this—that she must not be taken from town before the day fixed for her departure.”

“I think of going to-morrow,” said Lord George, gloomily.

“Then you must go alone, and I must remain with her.”

“Certainly not—certainly not.”

“She will not go. She shall not be made to run away. Though everything has to be told in the public prints, I will not submit to that. I suppose you do not dare to tell me that you suspect her of any evil?”

“She has been indiscreet.”

“Suppose I granted that—which I don’t—is she to be ground into dust in this way for indiscretion? Have not you been indiscreet?” Lord George made no direct answer to this question, fearing that the Dean had heard the story of the love-letter; but of that matter the Dean had heard nothing. “In all your dealings with her, can you tax yourself with no deviation from wisdom?”

“What a man does is different. No conduct of mine can blemish her name.”

“But may destroy her happiness—and if you go on in this way it will do so.”

During the whole of that day the matter was discussed. Lord George obstinately insisted on taking his wife down to Cross Hall, if not on the next day, then on the day after. But the Dean, and with the Dean the young wife, positively refused to accede to this arrangement. The Dean had his things brought from the inn to the house in Munster Court; and though he did not absolutely declare that he had come there for his daughter's protection, it was clear that this was intended. In such an emergency Lord George knew not what to do. Though the quarrel was already very bitter, he could not quite tell his father-in-law to leave the house; and then there was always present to his mind a feeling that the Dean had a right to be there in accordance with the pecuniary arrangement made. The Dean would have been welcome to the use of the house and all that was in it, if only Mary would have consented to be taken at once down to Cross Hall. But being under her father's wing, she would not consent. She pleaded that by going at once—or running away, as she called it—she would own that she had done something wrong, and she was earnest in declaring that nothing should wring such a confession from her. Everybody, she said, knew that she was to stay in London to the end of June. Everybody knew that she was then to go to the Deanery. It was not to be borne that people should say that her plans had been altered because she had danced the Kappa-kappa with Captain De Baron.

She must see her friends before she went or else her friends would know that she had been carried into banishment. In answer to this, Lord George declared that he, as husband, was paramount. This Mary did not deny, but, paramount as the authority was, she would not, in this instance, be governed by it.

It was a miserable day to them all. Many callers came, asking after Lady George, presuming that her speedy departure from the ball had been caused by her accident. No one was admitted, and all were told that she had not been much hurt. There were two or three stormy scenes between the Dean and his son-in-law, in one of which Lord George asked the Dean whether he conceived it to be compatible with his duty as a clergyman of the Church of England to induce a wife to disobey her husband. In answer to this, the Dean said that in such a matter the duty of a Church dignitary was the same as that of any other gentleman, and that he, as a gentleman, and also as a dignitary, meant to stand by his daughter. She refused to pack up, or to have her things packed. When he came to look into himself, he found that he had not power to bid the servants do it in opposition to their mistress. That the power of a husband was paramount he was well aware, but he did not exactly see his way to the exercise of it. At last he decided that he, at any rate, would go down to Cross Hall. If the Dean chose to create a separation between his daughter and her husband, he must bear the responsibility.

On the following day he did go down to Cross Hall, leaving his wife and her father in Munster Court without any definite plans.

CHAPTER XVIII.

As to Bluebeard.

WHEN Lord George left his own house alone he was very wretched, and his wife, whom he left behind him, was as wretched as himself. Of course the matter had not decided itself in this way without very much absolute quarrelling between them. Lord George had insisted, had stamped his foot, and had even talked of force. Mary, prompted by her father, had protested that she would not run away from the evil tongues of people who would be much more bitter in her absence than they would dare to be if she remained among them. He, when he found that his threat of forcible abduction was altogether vain, had to make up his mind whether he also would remain. But both the Dean and his wife had begged that he would do so, and he would not even seem to act in obedience to them. So he went, groaning much in spirit, puzzled to think what story he should tell to his mother and sisters, terribly anxious as to the future, and in spirit repentant for the rashness of his conduct at the ball. Before he was twenty miles out of London he was thinking with infinite regret of his love for his wife, already realising the misery of living without her, almost stirred to get out at the next station and return by

the first train to Munster Court. In this hour of his sorrow there came upon him a feeling of great hatred for Mrs. Houghton. He almost believed that she had for her own vile purposes excited Captain De Baron to make love to his wife. And then, in regard to that woman, his wife had behaved so well! Surely something was due to so much generosity. And then, when she had been angry with him, she had been more beautiful than ever. What a change had those few months in London made in her! She had lost her childish little timidities, and had bloomed forth a beautiful woman. He had no doubt as to her increased loveliness, and had been proud to think that all had acknowledged it. But as to the childish timidity, perhaps he would have preferred that it should not have been so quickly or so entirely banished. Even at Brotherton he hankered to return to London; but, had he done so, the Brotherton world would have known it. He put himself into a carriage instead, and had himself driven through the park to Cross Hall.

All this occurred on the day but one subsequent to the ball, and he had by the previous post informed Lady Sarah that he was coming. But in that letter he had said that he would bring his wife with him, and on his immediate arrival had to answer questions as to her unexpected absence. "Her father was very unwilling that she should come," he said.

"But I thought he was at the hotel," said Lady Sarah.

"He is in Munster Court, now. To tell the truth

I am not best pleased that it should be so; but at the last moment I did not like to contradict her. I hate London and everything in it. She likes it, and as there was a kind of bargain made I could not well depart from it."

"And you have left her alone with her father in London!" said Lady Susanna, with a tone of pretended dismay.

"How can she be alone if her father is with her," answered Lord George, who did not stand in awe of Lady Susanna as he did of Lady Sarah. Nothing further at the moment was said, but all the sisters felt that there was something wrong.

"I don't think it at all right that Mary should be left with the Dean," said the old lady to her second daughter. But the old lady was specially prejudiced against the Dean as being her eldest son's great enemy. Before the day was over Lord George wrote a long letter to his wife—full of affection indeed, but still more full of covert reproaches. He did not absolutely scold her; but he told her that there could be no happiness between a wife and a husband unless the wife would obey, and he implored her to come to him with as little delay as possible. If she would only come, all should be right between them.

Mary, when her husband was really gone, was much frightened at her own firmness. That doctrine of obedience to her husband had been accepted by her in full. When disposed to run counter to the ladies at Manor Cross, she always had declared to herself that they bore no authority delegated from

“George,” and that she would obey “George,” and no one but George. She had told him more than once, half-playfully, that if he wanted anything done he must tell her himself. And this, though he understood it to contain rebellion against the Germains generally, had a pleasant flavour with him as acknowledging so completely his own power. She had said to her father, and unfortunately to Mrs. Houghton when Mrs. Houghton was her friend, that she was not going to do what all the Germain women told her; but she had always spoken of her husband’s wishes as absolutely imperative. Now she was in open mutiny against her husband, and, as she thought of it, it seemed to her to be almost impossible that peace should be restored between them.

“I think I will go down very soon,” she said to her father, after she had received her husband’s letter.

“What do you call very soon?”

“In a day or two.”

“Do not do anything of the kind. Stay here till the appointed time comes. It is only a fortnight now. I have made arrangements at Brotherton, so that I can be with you till then. After that come down to me. Of course your husband will come over to you at the Deanery.”

“But if he shouldn’t come?”

“Then he would be behaving very wickedly. But, of course, he will come. He is not a man to be obstinate in that fashion.”

“I do not know that, papa.”

“But I do. You had better take my advice in

this matter. Of course I do not want to foster a quarrel between you and your husband."

"Pray—pray don't let there be a quarrel."

"Of course not. But the other night he lost his head, and treated you badly. You and I are quite willing to forgive and forget all that. Any man may do a foolish thing, and men are to be judged by general results rather than single acts."

"He is very kind to me—generally."

"Just so; and I am not angry with him in the least. But after what occurred it would be wrong that you should go away at once. You felt it yourself at the moment."

"But anything would be better than quarrelling, papa."

"Almost anything would be better than a lasting quarrel with your husband; but the best way to avoid that is to show him that you know how to be firm in such an emergency as this." She was, of course, compelled by her father's presence and her father's strength to remain in town, but she did so longing every hour to pack up and be off to Cross Hall. She had very often doubted whether she could love her husband as a husband ought to be loved, but now, in her present trouble, she felt sure of her own heart. She had never been really on bad terms with him before since their marriage, and the very fact of their separation increased her tenderness to him in a wonderful degree. She answered his letter with language full of love and promises of submission, loaded with little phrases of feminine worship, merely adding that papa thought she had better

stay in town till the end of the month. There was not a word of reproach in it. She did not allude to his harsh conduct at the ball, nor did she write the name of Mrs. Houghton.

Her father was very urgent with her to see all her friends, to keep any engagements previously made, to be seen at the play, and to let all the world know by her conduct that she was not oppressed by what had taken place. There was some intention of having the Kappa-kappa danced again, and as far as possible by the same people. Lord Giblet was to retire in favour of some more expert performer, but the others were supposed to be all worthy of an encore. But of course there arose a question as to Lady George. There could be no doubt that Lord George had disapproved very strongly of the Kappa-kappa. The matter got to the Dean's ears, and the Dean counselled his daughter to join the party yet again. "What would he say, papa?" The Dean was of opinion that in such case Lord George would say and do much less than he had said and done before. According to his views, Lord George must be taught that his wife had her privileges as well as he his. This fresh difficulty dissolved itself because the second performance was fixed for a day after that on which it had been long known that Lady George was to leave London; and even the Dean did not propose that she should remain in town after that date with a direct view to the Kappa-kappa.

She was astonished at the zeal with which he insisted that she should go out into the gay world.

He almost ridiculed her when she spoke of economy in her dress, and seemed to think that it was her duty to be a woman of fashion. He still spoke to her from time to time of the Popenjoy question, always asserting his conviction that, whatever the Marquis might think, even if he were himself deceived through ignorance of the law, the child would be at last held to be illegitimate. "They tell me, too," he said, "that his life is not worth a year's purchase."

"Poor little boy!"

"Of course, if he had been born as the son of the Marquis of Brotherton ought to be born, nobody would wish him anything but good."

"I don't wish him anything but good," said Mary.

"But as it is," continued the Dean, apparently not observing his daughter's remark, "everybody must feel that it would be better for the family that he should be out of the way. Nobody can think that such a child can live to do honour to the British peerage."

"He might be well brought up."

"He wouldn't be well brought up. He has an Italian mother and Italian belongings, and everything around him as bad as it can be. But the question at last is one of right. He was clearly born when his mother was reputed to be the wife, not of his father, but of another man. That cock-and-bull story which we have heard may be true. It is possible. But I could not rest in my bed if I did not persevere in ascertaining the truth." The

Dean did persevere, and was very constant in his visits to Mr. Battle's office. At this time Miss Tallowax came up to town, and she also stayed for a day or two in Munster Court. What passed between the Dean and his aunt on the subject Mary, of course, did not hear; but she soon found that Miss Tallowax was as eager as her father, and she learned that Miss Tallowax had declared that the inquiry should not languish from want of funds. Miss Tallowax was quite alive to the glory of the Brotherton connection.

As the month drew to an end Mary, of course, called on all her London friends. Her father was always eager to know whom she saw, and whether any allusion was made by any of them to the scene at the ball. But there was one person, whom she had been a friend, on whom she did not call, and this omission was observed by the Dean. "Don't you ever see Mrs. Houghton now?" he asked.

"No, papa," said Mary, with prompt decision.

"Why not?"

"I don't like her."

"Why don't you like her? You used to be friends. Have you quarrelled?"

"Yes; I have quarrelled with her."

"What did she do?" Mary was silent. "Is it a secret?"

"Yes, papa; it is a secret. I would rather you would not ask. But she is a nasty vile creature, and I will never speak to her again."

"That is strong language, Mary."

"It is. And now that I have said that, pray don't talk about her any more."

The Dean was discreet, and did not talk about Mrs. Houghton any more; but he set his mind to work to guess, and guessed something near the truth. Of course he knew that his son-in-law had professed at one time to love this lady when she had been Miss De Baron, and he had been able to see that subsequently to that they had been intimate friends. "I don't think, my dear," he said, laughing, "that you can be jealous of her attractions."

"I am not in the least jealous of her, papa. I don't know anyone that I think so ugly. She is a nasty made-up thing. But pray don't talk about her any more." Then the Dean almost knew that Mary had discovered something, and was too noble to tell a story against her husband.

The day but one before she was to leave town Mrs. Montacute Jones came to her. She had seen her kind old friend once or twice since the catastrophe at the ball, but always in the presence of other persons. Now they were alone together. "Well, my dear," said Mrs. Jones, "I hope you have enjoyed your short season. We have all been very fond of you."

"You have been very kind to me, Mrs. Jones."

"I do my best to make young people pleasant, my dear. You ought to have liked it all, for I don't know anybody who has been so much admired. His Royal Highness said the other night that you were the handsomest woman in London."

"His Royal Highness is an old fool," said Mary, laughing.

"He is generally thought to be a very good judge in that matter. You are going to keep the house, are you not?"

"Oh yes; I think there is a lease."

"I am glad of that. It is a nice little house, and I should be sorry to think that you are not coming back."

"We are always to live here half the year, I believe," said Mary. "That was agreed when we married, and that's why I go away now."

"Lord George, I suppose, likes the country best?"

"I think he does. I don't, Mrs. Jones."

"They are both very well in their way, my dear. I am a wicked old woman, who like to have everything gay. I never go out of town till everything is over, and I never come up till everything begins. We have a nice place down in Scotland, and you must come and see me there some autumn. And then we go to Rome. It's a pleasant way of living, though we have to move about so much."

"It must cost a great deal of money?"

"Well, yes. One can't drive four-in-hand so cheap as a pair. Mr. Jones has a large income." This was the first direct intimation Mary had ever received that there was a Mr. Jones. "But we weren't always rich. When I was your age I hadn't nearly so nice a house as you. Indeed, I hadn't a house at all, for I wasn't married, and was thinking whether I would take or reject a young barrister of

the name of Smith, who had nothing a year to support me on. You see I never got among the aristocratic names, as you have done."

"I don't care a bit about that."

"But I do. I like Germains, and Talbots, and Howards, and so does everybody else, only so many people tell lies about it. I like having lords in my drawing-room. They look handsomer and talk better than other men. That's my experience. And you are pretty nearly sure with them that you won't find you have got somebody quite wrong."

"I know a lord," said Mary, "who isn't very right. That is, I don't know him, for I never saw him."

"You mean your wicked brother-in-law. I should like to know him of all things. He'd be quite an attraction. I suppose he knows how to behave like a gentleman?"

"I'm not so sure of that. He was very rough to papa."

"Ah—yes. I think we can understand that, my dear. Your father hasn't made himself exactly pleasant to the Marquis. Not that I say he's wrong. I think it was a pity, because everybody says that the little Lord Popenjoy will die. You were talking of me and my glories, but long before you are my age you will be much more glorious. You will make a charming marchioness."

"I never think about it, Mrs. Jones; and I wish papa didn't. Why shouldn't the little boy live? I could be quite happy enough as I am if people would only be good to me and let me alone."

"Have I distressed you?" asked the old woman.

"Oh dear no; not you."

"You mean what happened at my house the other night?"

"I didn't mean anything particular, Mrs. Jones. But I do think that people sometimes are very ill-natured."

"I think, you know, that was Lord George's doing. He shouldn't have taken you off so suddenly. It wasn't your fault that the stupid man tripped. I suppose he doesn't like Captain De Baron."

"Don't talk about it, Mrs. Jones."

"Only that I know the world so well that what I say might, perhaps, be of use. Of course I know that he has gone out of town."

"Yes, he has gone."

"I was so glad that you didn't go with him. People will talk, you know, and it did look as though he were a sort of Bluebeard. Bluebeards, my dear, must be put down. There may be most well-intentioned Bluebeards, who have no chambers of horrors, no secrets"—Mary thought of the letter from Mrs. Houghton, of which nobody knew but herself—"who never cut off anybody's heads, but still interfere dreadfully with the comfort of a household. Lord George is very nearly all that a man ought to be."

"He is the best man in the world," said Mary.

"I am sure you think so. But he shouldn't be jealous, and above all he shouldn't show that he's jealous. You were bound, I think, to stay behind and show the world that you had nothing to fear. I suppose the Dean counselled it?"

"Yes; he did."

"Fathers of married daughters shouldn't often interfere, but there I think he was right. It is much better for Lord George himself that it should be so. There is nothing so damaging to a young woman as to have it supposed she has had to be withdrawn from the influence of a young man."

"It would be wicked of anybody to think so," said Mary, sobbing.

"But they must have thought so if you hadn't remained. You may be sure, my dear, that your father was quite right. I am sorry that you cannot make one in the dance again, because we shall have changed Lord Giblet for Lord Augustus Grandison, and I am sure it will be done very well. But of course I couldn't ask you to stay for it. As your departure was fixed beforehand you ought not to stay for it. But that is very different from being taken away in a jiffy, like some young man who is spending more than he ought to spend, and is hurried off suddenly nobody knows where."

Mary, when Mrs. Jones had left the house, found that upon the whole she was thankful to her friend for what had been said. It pained her to hear her husband described as a jealous Bluebeard; but the fact of his jealousy had been so apparent, that in any conversation on the matter intended to be useful so much had to be acknowledged. She, however, had taken the strong course of trusting to her father rather than to her husband, and she was glad to find that her conduct and her father's conduct were approved by so competent a judge as Mrs.

Montacute Jones. And throughout the whole interview there had been an air of kindness which Mary had well understood. The old lady had intended to be useful, and her intentions were accepted.

On the next morning, soon after breakfast, the Dean received a note which puzzled him much, and for an hour or two left him in doubt as to what he would do respecting it—whether he would comply with, or refuse to comply with, the request made in it. At first he said nothing of the letter to his daughter. He had, as she was aware, intended to go to Lincoln's Inn early in the day, but he sat thinking over something, instead of leaving the house, till at last he went to Mary and put the letter into her hands. "That," said he, "is one of the most unexpected communications I ever had in my life, and one which it is most difficult to answer. Just read it." The letter, which was very short, was as follows:

"The Marquis of Brotherton presents his compliments to the Dean of Brotherton, and begs to say that he thinks that some good might now be done by a personal interview. Perhaps the Dean will not object to call on the Marquis here at some hour after two o'clock to-morrow.

"Scumberg's Hotel, Albemarle Street.

"29th June, 187—"

"But we go to-morrow," said Mary.

"Ah! he means to-day. The note was written

last night. I have been thinking about it, and I think I shall go."

"Have you written to him?"

"There is no need. A man who sends to me a summons to come to him so immediately as that has no right to expect an answer. He does not mean anything honest."

"Then why do you go?"

"I don't choose to appear to be afraid to meet him. Everything that I do is done above board. I rather imagine that he doesn't expect me to come; but I will not let him have to say that he had asked me and that I had refused. I shall go."

"Oh, papa, what will he say to you?"

"I don't think he can eat me, my dear; nor will he dare even to murder me. I daresay he would if he could."

And so it was decided; and at the hour appointed the Dean sallied forth to keep the appointment.

CHAPTER XIX.

Scumberg's.

THE Dean, as he walked across the Park towards Albemarle Street, had many misgivings. He did not at all believe that the Marquis entertained friendly relations in regard to him, or even such neutral relations as would admit of the ordinary courtesies of civilised life. He made up his mind that he would be insulted—unless, indeed, he should be so cowed as to give way to the Marquis. But that he himself thought to be impossible. The more he reflected about it, the more assured he became that the Marquis had not expected him to obey the summons. It was possible that something might be gained on the other side by his refusal to see the elder brother of his son-in-law. He might, by refusing, leave it open to his enemies to say that he had rejected an overture to peace, and he now regarded as his enemies almost the entire Germain family. His own son-in-law would in future, he thought, be as much opposed to him as the head of the family. The old Marchioness, he knew, sincerely believed in Popenjoy. And the daughters, though they had at first been very strong in their aversion to the foreign mother and the foreign boy, were now averse to him also, on other grounds. Of

course Lord George would complain of his wife at Cross Hall. Of course the story of the Kappa-kappa would be told in a manner that would horrify those three ladies. The husband would of course be indignant at his wife's disobedience in not having left London when ordered by him to do so. He had promised not to foster a quarrel between Mary and Lord George, but he thought it by no means improbable that circumstances would for a time render it expedient that his daughter should live at the Deanery, while Lord George remained at Cross Hall. As to nothing was he more fully resolved than this, that he would not allow the slightest blame to be attributed to his daughter, without repudiating and resenting the imputation. Any word against her conduct, should such word reach his ears even through herself, he would resent, and it would go hard with him, but he would exceed such accusations by recriminations. He would let them know that, if they intended to fight, he also could fight. He had never uttered a word as to his own liberality in regard to money, but he had thought of it much. Theirs was the rank, and the rank was a great thing in his eyes; but his was at present the wealth; and wealth, he thought, was as powerful as rank. He was determined that his daughter should be a marchioness, and in pursuit of that object he was willing to spend his money; but he intended to let those among whom he spent it know that he was not to be set on one side, as a mere parson out of the country, who happened to have a good income of his own.

It was in this spirit—a spirit of absolute pugnacity—that he asked for the Marquis at Scumberg's Hotel. Yes; the Marquis was at home, and the servant would see if his master could be seen. "I fancy that I have an appointment with him," said the Dean, as he gave his card. "I am rather hurried, and if he can't see me perhaps you'll let me know at once." The man soon returned, and with much condescension told the Dean that his lordship would see him. "That is kind, as his lordship told me to come," said the Dean to himself, but still loud enough for the servant to hear him. "His lordship will be with you in a few minutes," said the man, as he shut the door of the sitting-room.

"I shall be gone if he's not here in a very few minutes," said the Dean, unable to restrain himself.

And he very nearly did go before the Marquis came to him. He had already walked to the rug with the object of ringing the bell, and had then decided on giving the lord two minutes more, resolving also that he would speak his mind to the lord about this delay, should the lord make his appearance before the two minutes were over. The time had just expired when his lordship did make his appearance. He came shuffling into the room after a servant, who walked before him with the pretence of carrying books and a box of papers. It had all been arranged, the Marquis knowing that he would secure the first word by having his own servant in the room. "I am very much obliged to you for coming, Mr. Dean," he said. "Pray sit down. I

should have been here to receive you if you had sent me a line."

"I only got your note this morning," said the Dean, angrily.

"I thought that perhaps you might have sent a message. It doesn't signify in the least. I never go out till after this, but had you named a time I should have been here to receive you. That will do, John; shut the door. Very cold, don't you think it."

"I have walked, my lord, and am warm."

"I never walk, never could walk. I don't know why it is, but my legs won't walk."

"Perhaps you never tried."

"Yes, I have. They wanted me to walk in Switzerland twenty years ago, but I broke down after the first mile. George used to walk like the very d——. You see more of him now than I do. Does he go on walking?"

"He is an active man."

"Just that. He ought to have been a country letter-carrier. He would have been as punctual as the sun, and has quite all the necessary intellect."

"You sent for me, Lord Brotherton——"

"Yes; yes. I had something that I thought I might as well say to you, though, upon my word, I almost forget what it was."

"Then I may as well take my leave."

"Don't do that. You see, Mr. Dean, belonging to the church militant as you do, you are so

heroically pugnacious! You must like fighting very much."

"When I have anything which I conceive it to be my duty to fight for, I think I do."

"Things are generally best got without fighting. You want to make your grandson Marquis of Brotherton."

"I want to ensure to my grandson anything that may be honestly and truly his own."

"You must first catch a grandson."

It was on his lips to say that certainly no heir should be caught on his side of the family after the fashion that had been practised by his lordship in catching the present pseudo-Popenjoy; but he was restrained by a feeling of delicacy in regard to his own daughter. "My lord," he said, "I am not here to discuss any such contingency."

"But you don't scruple to discuss my contingency, and that in the most public manner. It has suited me, or at any rate it has been my chance, to marry a foreigner. Because you don't understand Italian fashions you don't scruple to say that she is not my wife."

"I have never said so."

"And to declare that my son is not my son."

"I have never said that."

"And to set a dozen attorneys to work to prove that my heir is a bastard."

"We heard of your marriage, my lord, as having been fixed for a certain date—a date long subsequent to that of the birth of your son. What were we to think?"

"As if that hadn't been explained to you, and to all the world, a dozen times over. Did you never hear of a second marriage being solemnised in England to satisfy certain scruples? You have sent out and made your inquiries, and what have they come to? I know all about it."

"As far as I am concerned you are quite welcome to know everything."

"I daresay; even though I should be stung to death by the knowledge. Of course I understand. You think that I have no feeling at all."

"Not much as to duty to your family, certainly," said the Dean, stoutly.

"Exactly. Because I stand a little in the way of your new ambition, I am the Devil himself. And yet you, and those who have abetted you, think it odd that I haven't received you with open arms. My boy is as much to me as ever was your daughter to you."

"Perhaps so, my lord. The question is not whether he is beloved, but whether he is Lord Popenjoy."

"He is Lord Popenjoy. He is a poor weakling, and I doubt whether he may enjoy the triumph long, but he is Lord Popenjoy. You must know it yourself, Dean."

"I know nothing of the kind," said the Dean, furiously.

"Then you must be a very self-willed man. When this began George was joined with you in the unnatural inquiry. He at any rate has been convinced."

"It may be he has submitted himself to his brother's influence."

"Not in the least, George is not very clever, but he has at any rate had wit enough to submit to the influence of his own legal adviser—or rather to the influence of your legal adviser. Your own man, Mr. Battle, is convinced. You are going on with this in opposition even to him. What the devil is it you want? I am not dead, and may outlive at any rate you. Your girl hasn't got a child, and doesn't seem likely to have one. You happen to have married her into a noble family, and now, upon my word, it seems to me that you are a little off your head with downright pride."

"Was it for this you sent for me?"

"Well—yes it was. I thought it might be as well to argue it out. It isn't likely that there should be much love between us, but we needn't cut each other's throats. It is costing us both a d——d lot of money; but I should think that my purse must be longer than yours."

"We will try it, my lord."

"You intend to go on with this persecution then?"

"The Countess Luigi was presumably a married woman when she bore that name, and I look upon it as a sacred duty to ascertain whether she was so or not."

"Sacred!" said the Marquis, with a sneer.

"Yes; sacred. There can be no more sacred duty than that which a father owes to his child."

"Ah!" Then the Marquis paused, and looked

at the Dean before he went on speaking. He looked so long that the Dean was preparing to take his hat in his hand ready for a start. He showed that he was going to move, and then the Marquis went on speaking. "Sacred! Ah!—and such a child!"

"She is one of whom I am proud as a father, and you should be proud as a sister-in-law."

"Oh, of course. So I am. The Germains were never so honoured before. As for her birth I care nothing about that. Had she behaved herself, I should have thought nothing of the stable."

"What do you dare to say?" said the Dean, jumping from his seat.

The Marquis sat leaning back in his arm-chair, perfectly motionless. There was a smile—almost a pleasant smile on his face. But there was a very devil in his eye, and the Dean, who stood some six feet remove from him, saw the devil plainly. "I live a solitary life here, Mr. Dean," said the Marquis, "but even I have heard of her."

"What have you heard?"

"All London have heard of her—this future Marchioness, whose ambition is to drive my son from his title and estates. A sacred duty, Mr. Dean, to put a coronet on the head of that young——!" The word which we have not dared to print was distinctly spoken—more distinctly, more loudly, more incisively, than any word which had yet fallen from the man's lips. It was evident that the lord had prepared the word, and had sent for the father that the father might hear the word

applied to his own daughter—unless indeed he should first acknowledge himself to have lost his case. So far the interview had been carried out very much in accordance with the preparations as arranged by the Marquis; but, as to what followed, the Marquis had hardly made his calculations correctly.

A clergyman's coat used to save him from fighting in fighting days; and even in these days, in which broils and personal encounters are held to be generally disreputable, it saves the wearer from certain remote dangers to which other men are liable. And the reverse of this is also true. It would probably be hard to extract a first blow from the whole bench of bishops. And deans as a rule are more sedentary, more quiescent, more given to sufferance even than bishops. The normal dean is a goodly, sleek, bookish man, who would hardly strike a blow under any provocation. The Marquis, perhaps, had been aware of this. He had, perhaps, fancied that he was as good a man as the Dean, who was at least ten years his senior. He had not at any rate anticipated such speedy violence as followed the utterance of the abominable word.

The Dean, as I have said, had been standing about six feet from the easy-chair in which the Marquis was lolling when the word was spoken. He had already taken his hat in his hand and thought of some means of showing his indignation as he left the room. Now his first impulse was to rid himself of his hat, which he did by pitching it along the floor. And then in an instant he was at the lord's

throat. The lord had expected it so little that up to the last he made no preparation for defence. The Dean had got him by his cravat and shirt-collar before he had begun to expect such usage as this. Then he simply gurgled out some ejaculated oath, uttered half in surprise and half in prayer. Prayer certainly was now of no use. Had five hundred feet of rock been there the Marquis would have gone down it, though the Dean had gone with him. Fire flashed from the clergyman's eyes, and his teeth were set fast, and his very nostrils were almost ablaze. His daughter! The holy spot of his life! The one being in whom he believed with all his heart and with all his strength!

The Dean was fifty years of age, but no one had ever taken him for an old man. They who at home at Brotherton would watch his motions, how he walked and how he rode on horseback, how he would vault his gates when in the fields, and scamper across the country like a schoolboy, were wont to say that he was unclerical. Perhaps Canons Pountner and Holdenough, with Mr. Groschut, the bishop's chaplain, envied him something of his juvenile elasticity. But I think that none of them had given him credit for such strength as he now displayed. The Marquis, in spite of what feeble efforts he made, was dragged up out of his chair and made to stand, or rather to totter, on his legs. He made a clutch at the bell-rope, which, to aid his luxurious ease, had been brought close to his hand as he sat, but failed, as the Dean shook him hither and thither. Then he was dragged on to the middle of the rug, feeling by

this time that he was going to be throttled. He attempted to throw himself down, and would have done so, but that the Dean with his left hand prevented him from falling. He made one vigorous struggle to free himself, striving as he did so to call for assistance. But the Dean, having got his victim's back to the fireplace, and having the poor wretch now fully at his command, threw the man with all his strength into the empty grate. The Marquis fell like a heap within the fender, with his back against the top bar and his head driven farther back against the bricks and iron. There for a second or two he lay like a dead mass.

Less than a minute had done it all, and for so long a time the Dean's ungoverned fury had held its fire. What were consequences to him with that word as applied to his child ringing in his ears? How should he moderate his wrath under such outrage as that? Was it not as though beast had met beast in the forest between whom nothing but internecine fight to the end was possible? But when that minute was over, and he saw what he had done—when the man, tumbled, dishevelled, all a lump, and already bloody, was lying before him—then he remembered who he was himself and what it was that he had done. He was Dean Lovelace, who had already made for himself more than enough of clerical enmity; and this other man was the Marquis of Brotherton, whom he had perhaps killed in his wrath, with no witness by to say a word as to the provocation he had received.

The Marquis groaned and impotently moved an

arm as though to raise himself. At any rate, he was not dead as yet. With a desire to do what was right now, the Dean rang the bell violently, and then stooped down to extricate his foe. He had succeeded in raising the man, and in seating him on the floor with his head against the arm-chair before the servant came. Had he wished to conceal anything, he could without much increased effort have dragged the Marquis up into his chair; but he was anxious now simply that all the truth should be known. It seemed to him still that no one, knowing the real truth, would think that he had done wrong. His child! His daughter! His sweetly innocent daughter! The man soon rushed into the room, for the ringing of the bell had been very violent.

"Send for a doctor," said the Dean, "and send the landlord up."

"Has my lord had a fit?" said the man, advancing into the room. He was the servant, not of the hotel, but of the Marquis himself.

"Do as I bid you: get a doctor and send up the landlord immediately. It is not a fit, but his lordship has been much hurt. I knocked him down." The Dean made the last statement slowly and firmly, under a feeling at the moment that it became him to leave nothing concealed, even with a servant.

"He has murdered me," groaned the Marquis. The injured one could speak at least, and there was comfort in that. The servant rushed back to the regions below, and the tidings were soon spread

through the house. Resident landlord there was none. There never are resident landlords in London hotels. Scumberg was a young family of joint heirs and heiresses, named Tomkins, who lived at Hastings, and the house was managed by Mrs. Walker. Mrs. Walker was soon in the room, with a German deputy-manager, kept to maintain the foreign Scumberg connection, and with them sundry waiters and the head-chambermaid. Mrs. Walker made a direct attack upon the Dean, which was considerably weakened by accusations from the lips of the Marquis himself. Had he remained speechless for awhile, the horrors of the Dean's conduct would have been greatly aggravated. "My good woman," said the Dean, "wait till some official is here. You cannot understand. And get a little warm water and wash his lordship's head."

"He has broken my back," said his lordship. "Oh, oh, oh."

"I am glad to hear you speak, Lord Brotherton," said the Dean. "I think you will repent having used such a word as that to my daughter." It would be necessary now that everybody should understand everything; but how terrible would it be for the father even to say that such a name had been applied to his child!

First there came two policemen, then a surgeon, and then a sergeant. "I will do anything that you suggest, Mr. Constable," said the Dean, "though I hope it may not be necessary that I should remain in custody. I am the Dean of Brotherton." The sergeant made a sign of putting his finger up to his

cap. "This man, as you know, is the Marquis of Brotherton." The sergeant bowed to the groaning nobleman. "My daughter is married to his brother. There have been family quarrels, and he just now applied a name to his own sister-in-law, to my child—which I will not utter because there are women here. Fouler slander never came from a man's mouth. I took him from his chair and threw him beneath the grate. Now you know it all. Were it to do again, I would do it again."

"She is a ——," said the imprudent, prostrate Marquis. The sergeant, the doctor who was now present, and Mrs. Walker suddenly became the Dean's friends. The Marquis was declared to be much shaken, to have a cut head, and to be very badly bruised about the muscles of the back. But a man who could so speak of his sister-in-law, deserved to have his head cut and his muscles bruised. Nevertheless the matter was too serious to be passed over without notice. The doctor could not say that the unfortunate nobleman had received no permanent injury—and the sergeant had not an opportunity of dealing with deans and marquises every day of his life. The doctor remained with his august patient and had him put to bed, while the Dean and the sergeant together went off in a cab to the police-office, which lies in the little crowded streets between the crooked part of Regent Street and Piccadilly. Here depositions were taken and forms filled, and the Dean was allowed to depart with an understanding that he was to be forthcoming immediately when wanted. He suggested that it had been his

intention to go down to Brotherton on the following day, but the superintendent of police recommended him to abandon that idea. The superintendent thought that the Dean had better make arrangements to stay in London till the end of the week.

CHAPTER XX.

“Not Go!”

THE Dean had a great deal to think of as he walked home a little too late for his daughter's usual dinner hour. What should he tell her—and what should he do as to communicating or not communicating tidings of the day's work to Lord George? Of course everybody must know what had been done, sooner or later. He would have had no objection to that—providing the truth could be told accurately—except as to the mention of his daughter's name in the same sentence with that abominable word. But the word would surely be known, and the facts would not be told with accuracy unless he told them himself. His only, but his fully sufficient defence was in the word. But who would know the tone? Who would understand the look of the man's eyes and the smile on his mouth? Who could be made to conceive, as the Dean himself had conceived, the aggravated injury of the premeditated slander? He would certainly write and tell Lord George everything. But to his daughter he thought that he would tell as little as possible. Might God in his mercy save her ears, her sacred feelings, her pure heart from the wound of that word! He felt that she was dearer to him than ever she had been—that he

would give up Deanery and everything if he could save her by doing so. But he felt that if she were to be sacrificed in the contest, he would give up Deanery and everything in avenging her.

But something must be told to her. He at any rate must remain in town, and it would be very desirable that she should stay with him. If she went alone she would at once be taken to Cross Hall; and he could understand that the recent occurrence would not add to the serenity of her life there. The name that had been applied to her, together with the late folly of which her husband had been guilty, would give those Manor Cross dragons—as the Dean was apt in his own thoughts to call the Ladies Germain—a tremendous hold over her. And should she be once at Cross Hall, he would hardly be able to get her back to the Deanery.

He hurried up to dress as soon as he reached the house, with a word of apology as to being late, and then found her in the drawing-room. "Papa," she said, "I do like Mrs. Montacute Jones."

"So do I, my dear, because she is good-humoured."

"But she is so good-natured also! She has been here again to-day, and wants me and George to go down to Scotland in August. I should so like it."

"What will George say?"

"Of course he won't go; and of course I shan't. But that doesn't make it the less good-natured. She wishes all her set to think that what happened the other night doesn't mean anything."

"I'm afraid he won't consent."

"I know he won't. He wouldn't know what to do with himself. He hates a house full of people. And now tell me what the Marquis said." But dinner was announced, and the Dean was not forced to answer this question immediately.

"Now, papa," she said again, as soon as the coffee was brought and the servant was gone, "do tell me what my most noble brother-in-law wanted to say to you."

That he certainly would not tell. "Your brother-in-law, my 'dear,' behaved about as badly as a man could behave."

"Oh dear! I am so sorry!"

"We have to be sorry—both of us. And your husband will be sorry." He was so serious that she hardly knew how to speak to him. "I cannot tell you everything; but he insulted me, and I was forced to—strike him."

"Strike him! Oh papa!"

"Bear with me, Mary. In all things I think well of you, and do you try to think well of me."

"Dear papa! I will. I do. I always did."

"Anything he might have said of myself I could have borne. He could have applied no epithet to me which, I think, could even have ruffled me. But he spoke evil of you." While he was sitting there he made up his mind that he would tell her as much as that, though he had before almost resolved that he would not speak to her of herself. But she must hear something of the truth, and better that she should hear it from his than from other lips. She turned very pale, but did not immediately make

any reply. "Then I was full of wrath," he continued. "I did not even attempt to control myself; but I took him by the throat and flung him violently to the ground. He fell upon the grate, and it may be that he has been hurt. Had the fall killed him he would have deserved it. He had courage to wound a father in his tenderest part, only because that father was a clergyman. His belief in a black coat will, I think, be a little weakened by what occurred to-day."

"What will be done?" she asked, whispering.

"Heaven only knows. But I can't go out of town to-morrow. I shall write to George to-night and tell him everything that has occurred, and shall beg that you may be allowed to stay with me for the few days that will be necessary."

"Of course I will not leave you."

"It is not that. But I do not want you to go to Cross Hall quite at present. If you went without me, they would not let you come to the Deanery. Of course there will be a great commotion at Cross Hall. Of course they will condemn me. Many will condemn me, as it will be impossible to make the world believe the exact truth."

"I will never condemn you," she said. Then she came over and threw herself on her knees at his feet, and embraced him. "But, papa, what did the man say of me?"

"Not what he believed—but what he thought would give me the greatest anguish. Never mind. Do not ask any more questions. You also had better write to your husband, and you can tell him fully

all that I have told you. If you will write to-night I will do so also, and I will take care that they shall have our letters to-morrow afternoon. We must send a message to say that we shall not be at the Deanery to-morrow." The two letters to Lord George were both written that night, and were both very long. They told the same story, though in a different tone. The Dean was by no means apologetic, but was very full and very true. When he came to the odious word he could not write it, but he made it very clear without writing. Would not the husband feel as he the father had felt in regard to his young wife, the sweet pure girl of whose love and possession he ought to be so proud? How would any brother be forgiven who had assailed such a treasure as this—much less such a brother as this Marquis? Perhaps Lord George might think it right to come up. The Dean would of course call at the hotel on the following day, and would go to the police-office. He believed, he said, that no permanent injury had been done. Then came, perhaps, the pith of his letter. He trusted that Lord George would agree with him in thinking that Mary had better remain with him in town during the two or three days of his necessarily prolonged sojourn. This was put in the form of a request; but was put in a manner intended to show that the request if not granted would be enforced. The Dean was fully determined that Mary should not at once go down to Cross Hall.

Her letter was supplicatory, spasmodic, full of sorrow, and full of love. She was quite sure that

her dear papa would have done nothing that he ought not to have done; but yet she was very sorry for the Marquis, because of his mother and sisters, and because of her dear, dear George. Could he not run up to them and hear all about it from papa? If the Marquis had said ill-natured things of her, it was very cruel, because nobody loved her husband better than she loved her dear, dear George—and so on. The letters were then sent under cover to the housekeeper at the Deanery, with orders to send them on by private messenger to Cross Hall.

On the following day the Dean went to Scumberg's, but could not learn much there. The Marquis had been very bad, and had had one and another doctor with him almost continually; but Mrs. Walker could not take upon herself to say that "it was dangerous." She thought it was "in'ard." Mrs. Walkers always do think that it is "in'ard," when there is nothing palpable outward. At any rate his lordship had not been out of bed, and had taken nothing but tapioca and brandy. There was very little more than this to be learned at the police-court. The case might be serious, but the superintendent hoped otherwise. The superintendent did not think that the Dean should go down quite to-morrow. The morrow was Friday; but he suggested Saturday as possible, Monday as almost certain. It may be as well to say here that the Dean did not call at the police-court again, and heard nothing further from the officers of the law respecting the occurrence at Scumberg's. On the Friday he called again at Scumberg's, and the Marquis was still in

bed. His "in'ards" had not ceased to be matter of anxiety to Mrs. Walker; but the surgeon, whom the Dean now saw, declared that the muscles of the nobleman's back were more deserving of sympathy. The surgeon, with a gravity that almost indicated offence, expressed his opinion that the Marquis's back had received an injury which—which might be—very injurious.

Lord George, when he received the letters, was thrown into a state of mind that almost distracted him. During the last week or two the animosity felt at Cross Hall against the Marquis had been greatly weakened. A feeling had come upon the family that after all Popenjoy was Popenjoy; and that, although the natal circumstances of such a Popenjoy were doubtless unfortunate for the family generally, still, as an injury had been done to the Marquis by the suspicion, those circumstances ought now to be in a measure forgiven. The Marquis was the head of the family, and a family will forgive much to its head when that head is a Marquis. As we know, the Dowager had been in his favour from the first; Lord George had lately given way and had undergone a certain amount of reconciliation with his brother. Lady Amelia had seceded to her mother, as had also Mrs. Toff, the old housekeeper. Lady Susanna was wavering, having had her mind biased by the objectionable conduct of the Dean and his daughter. Lady Sarah was more stanch. Lady Sarah had never yet given way; she never did give way; and, in her very heart, she was the best friend that Mary had among the ladies of the family.

But when her brother gave up the contest she felt that further immediate action was impossible. Things were in this strait at Cross Hall when Lord George received the two letters. He did not wish to think well of the Dean just at present, and was horrified at the idea of a clergyman knocking a marquis into the fireplace. But the word indicated was very plain, and that word had been applied to his own wife. Or, perhaps, no such word had really been used. Perhaps the Dean had craftily saved himself from an absolute lie, and in his attempt to defend the violence of his conduct had brought an accusation against the Marquis which was, in its essence, untrue. Lord George was quite alive to the duty of defending his wife; but in doing so he was no longer anxious to maintain affectionate terms with his wife's father. She had been very foolish. All the world had admitted as much. He had seen it with his own eyes at that wretched ball. She had suffered her name to be joined with that of a stranger in a manner derogatory to her husband's honour. It was hardly surprising that his brother should have spoken of her conduct in disparaging terms; but he did not believe that his brother had used that special term. Personal violence—blows and struggling, and that on the part of a Dean of the Church of England, and violence such as this seemed to have been—violence that might have killed the man attacked, seemed to him to be in any case unpardonable. He certainly could not live on terms of friendship with the Dean immediately after such a deed. His wife must be taken away and secluded,

and purified by a long course of German asceticism.

But what must he do now at once? He felt that it was his duty to hurry up to London, but he could not bring himself to live in the same house with the Dean. His wife must be taken away from her father. However bad may have been the language used by the Marquis, however indefensible, he could not allow himself even to seem to keep up affectionate relations with the man who had half-slaughtered his brother. He, too, thought of what the world would say; he, too, felt that such an affair, after having become known to the police, would be soon known to everyone else. But what must he do at once? He had not as yet made up his mind as to this when he took his place at the Brotherton Railway Station on the morning after he had received the letters.

But on reaching the station in London he had so far made up his mind as to have his portmanteau taken to the hotel close at hand, and then to go to Munster Court. He had hoped to find his wife alone; but on his arrival the Dean was there also. "Oh George," she said, "I am so glad you have come; where are your things?" He explained that he had no things, that he had come up only for a short time, and had left his luggage at the station. "But you will stay here to-night?" asked Mary, in despair.

Lord George hesitated, and the Dean at once saw how it was. "You will not go back to Brotherton to-day," he said. Now, at this moment the Dean

had to settle in his mind the great question whether it would be best for his girl that she should be separated from her husband or from her father. In giving him his due it must be acknowledged that he considered only what might in truth be best for her. If she were now taken away from him there would be no prospect of recovery. After all that had passed, after Lord George's submission to his brother, the Dean was sure that he would be held in abhorrence by the whole Germain family. Mary would be secluded and trodden on, and reduced to pale submission by all the dragons till her life would be miserable. Lord George himself would be prone enough to domineer in such circumstances. And then that ill word which had been spoken, and which could only be effectually burned out of the thoughts of people by a front to the world at the same time innocent and bold, would stick to her forever if she were carried away into obscurity.

But the Dean knew as well as others know how great is the evil of a separation, and how specially detrimental such a step would be to a young wife. Than a permanent separation anything would be better; better even that she should be secluded and maligned, and even, for a while, trodden under foot. Were such separation to take place, his girl would have been altogether sacrificed, and her life's happiness brought to shipwreck. But then a permanent separation was not probable. She had done nothing wrong. The husband and wife did in truth love each other dearly. The Marquis would be soon gone, and then Lord George would return to his

old habits of thought and his old allegiance. Upon the whole, the Dean thought it best that his present influence should be used in taking his daughter to the Deanery.

"I should like to return quite early to-morrow," said Lord George, very gravely, "unless my brother's condition should make it impossible."

"I trust you won't find your brother much the worse for what has happened," said the Dean.

"But you will sleep here to-night?" repeated Mary.

"I will come for you the first thing in the morning," said Lord George in the same funereal voice.

"But why—why?"

"I shall probably have to be a good deal with my brother during the afternoon. But I will be here again in the afternoon. You can be at home at five, and you can get your things ready for going to-morrow."

"Won't you dine here?"

"I think not."

Then there was silence for a minute. Mary was completely astounded. Lord George wished to say nothing further in the presence of his father-in-law. The Dean was thinking how he would begin to use his influence. "I trust you will not take Mary away to-morrow."

"Oh!—certainly."

"I trust not. I must ask you to hear me say a few words about this."

"I must insist on her coming with me to-morrow,

even though I should have to return to London myself afterwards.”

“Mary,” said her father, “leave us for a moment.” Then Mary retired, with a very saddened air. “Do you understand, George, what it was that your brother said to me?”

“I suppose so,” he answered hoarsely.

“Then, no doubt, I may take it for granted that you approve of the violence of my resentment? To me as a clergyman, and as a man past middle life, the position was very trying. But had I been an archbishop, tottering on the grave with years, I must have endeavoured to do the same.” This he said with great energy. “Tell me, George, that you think that I was right.”

But George had not heard the word, had not seen the man’s face. And then, though he would have gone to a desert island with his wife, had such exile been necessary for her protection, he did believe that she had misconducted herself. Had he not seen her whirling round the room with that man after she had been warned against him. “It cannot be right to murder a man,” he said at last.

“You do not thank me, then, for vindicating your honour and your wife’s innocence?”

“I do not think that that was the way. The way is to take her home.”

“Yes; to her old home—to the Deanery for awhile; so that the world, which will no doubt hear the malignant epithet applied to her by your wicked brother, may know that both her husband and her

father support her. You had promised to come to the Deanery."

"We cannot do that now."

"Do you mean that, after what has passed, you will take your brother's part?"

"I will take my wife to Cross Hall," he said, leaving the room, and following Mary up to her chamber.

"What am I to do, papa?" she said, when she came down about half an hour afterwards. Lord George had then started to Scumberg's, saying that he would come to Munster Court again before dinner, but telling her plainly that he would not sit down to dine with her father. "He has determined to quarrel with you."

"It will only be for a time, dearest."

"But what shall I do?"

Now came the peril of the answer. He was sure, almost sure, that she would in this emergency rely rather upon him than on her husband, if he were firm; but should he be firm as against the husband, how great would be his responsibility! "I think, my dear," he said at last, "that you should go with me to Brotherton."

"But he will not let me."

"I think that you should insist on his promise."

"Don't make us quarrel, papa."

"Certainly not. Anything would be better than a permanent quarrel. But, after what has been said, after the foul lies that have been told, I think that you should assert your purpose of staying for

awhile with your father. Were you now to go to Cross Hall there would be no limit to their tyranny."

He left her without a word more, and calling at Scumberg's Hotel, was told that the Marquis could not move.

At that moment Lord George was with his brother, and the Marquis could talk though he could not move. "A precious family you've married into, George," he said, almost as soon as his brother was in the room. Then he gave his own version of the affair, leaving his brother in doubt as to the exact language that had been used. "He ought to have been a coalheaver instead of a clergyman," said the Marquis.

"Of course he would be angry," said Lord George.

"Nothing astonishes me so much," said the Marquis, "as the way in which you fellows here think you may say whatever comes into your head about my wife, because she is an Italian, and you seem to be quite surprised if I object; yet you rage like wild beasts if the compliment is returned. Why am I to think better of your wife than you of mine?"

"I have said nothing against your wife, Brother-ton."

"By—— I think you have said a great deal—and with much less reason than I have. What did you do yourself when you found her struggling in that fellow's arms at the old woman's party?" Some good-natured friend had told the Marquis the whole

story of the Kappa-kappa. "You can't be deaf to what all the world is saying of her." This was wormwood to the wretched husband, and yet he could not answer with angry, self-reliant indignation, while his brother was lying almost motionless before him.

Lord George found that he could do nothing at Scumberg's Hotel. He was assured that his brother was not in danger, and that the chief injury done was to the muscles of his back, which, bruised and lacerated as they were, would gradually recover such elasticity as they had ever possessed. But other words were said and other hints expressed, all of which tended to increase his animosity against the Dean, and almost to engender anger against his wife. To himself, personally, except in regard to his wife, his brother had not been ungracious. The Marquis intended to return to Italy as soon as he could. He hated England and everything in it. Manor Cross would very soon be at Lord George's disposal, "though I do hope," said the Marquis, "that the lady who has condescended to make me her brother-in-law, will never reign paramount there." By degrees there crept on Lord George's mind a feeling that his brother looked to a permanent separation—something like a repudiation. Over and over again he spoke of Mary as though she had disgraced herself utterly; and when Lord George defended his wife, the lord only smiled and sneered.

The effect upon Lord George was to make him very imperious as he walked back to Munster Court. He could not repudiate his wife, but he would take

her away with a very high hand. Crossing the Green Park, at the back of Arlington Street, whom should he meet but Mrs. Houghton with her cousin Jack. He raised his hat, but could not stop a moment. Mrs. Houghton made an attempt to arrest him—but he escaped without a word and went on very quickly. His wife had behaved generously about Mrs. Houghton. The sight of the woman brought that truth to his mind. He was aware of that. But no generosity on the part of the wife, no love, no temper, no virtue, no piety can be accepted by Cæsar as weighing a grain in counterpoise against even suspicion.

He found his wife and asked her whether her things were being packed. “I cannot go to-morrow,” she said.

“Not go!”

“No, George—not to Cross Hall. I will go to the Deanery. You promised to go to the Deanery.”

“I will not go to the Deanery. I will go to Cross Hall.” There was an hour of it, but during the entire hour, the young wife persisted obstinately that she would not be taken to Cross Hall. “She had,” she said, “been very badly treated by her husband’s family.” “Not by me,” shouted the husband. She went on to say that nothing could now really put her right but the joint love of her father and her husband. Were she at Cross Hall her father could do nothing for her. She would not go to Cross Hall. Nothing short of policemen should take her to Cross Hall to-morrow.

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